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Adventure

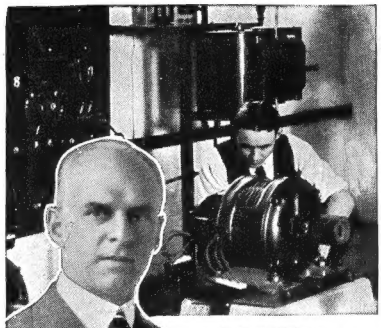
Harold Lamb
Sidney Herschel Small
Thomson Burtis
William Harper Dean
Bill Adams
Conroy Kroder
Charles Victor Fischer
Hugh Pendexter
Clements Ripley
John Eyton

1 Complete Novel
2 Complete Novelettes

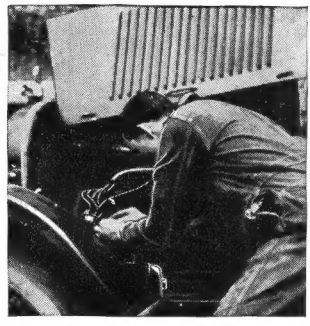
JANUARY 30th ISSUE, 1924
VOL. XLIV No. 6

ADVENTURE

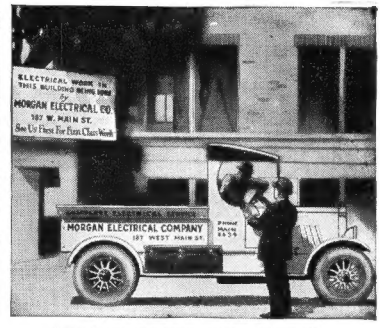
25 Cents



Herbert Dickerson, Warrenton, Va., makes $7,500 a year



Automotive Electricity pays W. E. Pence, Chehalis, Wash., over $9,000 a year



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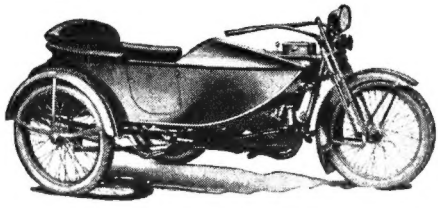

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ALEMITE lubrication—first on any motorcycle—makes the "weekly once-over" of the 1924 Harley-Davidson a clean, easy, five minutes job. This handy, thorough system is just another refinement—more evidence of the engineering that keeps the Harley-Davidson, year after year, the finest motorcycle ever built.

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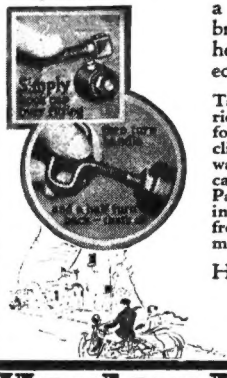

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"I was feeling pretty blue. Pay-day had come again and the raise I'd hoped for wasn't there. It began to look as though I was to spend the rest of my life checking orders—at $20 a week!

"I picked up a magazine. It fell open at a familiar advertisement, and a coupon stared me in the face. Month after month I'd been seeing that coupon, but never until that moment had I thought of it as meaning anything to me. But this time I read the advertisement twice—yes, every word. *And this time I tore out the coupon!*

"That was the turn in the road for me. The Schools at Scranton suggested just the course of training I needed and they worked with me every hour I had to spare.

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For 31 years, the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men to win promotion, to earn more money, to get ahead in business and in life.

You too, can have the position you want in the work you like best. All we ask is the chance to prove it. Just mark and mail this coupon. Do it right now!

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☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
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Occupation.....
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ADVENTURE
Jan. 30th, 1924

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 44
Number 6

A Queer Human Kink

WHAT strange bundles of contradictions we all are! We tell each other earnestly that health is one of the most precious things in life—and yet what do we do to keep it, to protect it? It's a queer kink in human nature, isn't it, to *think* one way and *act* just the opposite!

The Harm of Self-Diagnosis

You know how idle people love to talk over symptoms and recklessly recommend all sorts of cure-all remedies.

What a tremendous amount of harm is done by attempts at self-diagnosis! Here is an example: A prominent man made up his mind that he was eating too much meat and heroically put himself on a strict diet. Sometime later, he was taken ill. His doctor astonished him by saying that while most men of his age would have benefited by doing what he had done, his case was an exception and that *lack* of meat caused the trouble.

How Long Do You Want To Live?

Just so long as you are well and happy? Good!—but suppose you keep right on living long after you have ceased to be well!

Stop right here and think about it.

You would not treat your car as you treat yourself. You constantly test the steering gear and the brake bands. You make sure that bolts are tight. You listen to the motor for the faintest "knock". You are careful about the fuel mixture—it must not be too rich nor too lean or the engine will not pull properly.

But do you know whether the food—the "fuel mixture"—that you give your own body is too rich or too lean? You can replace parts of your car, but you can't replace a worn-out heart, an abused stomach, an over-worked liver or frayed nerves.

Years Alone Do Not Age Us

The physical changes ascribed to age may be due to poison, infection, wrong food or emotional strain, principally worry. And these things are in large degree under our own control.

Go to your wisest adviser, your own good friend, your Doctor, within the next few days, and have a *thorough* examination. If you are well, you will be glad to have his O. K. And if he finds some slight defect, be thankful that it can be corrected in time—before it becomes serious.

Begin the New Year right!

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company believes thoroughly in the value of the annual physical examination. All of the 8,000 employees of the Home Office are carefully examined each year; also its field force of nearly 20,000 employees. These examinations are carefully followed up and those employees who show impairments receive particular attention. The result of such intensive care is very gratifying.

During the past ten years, the Company has arranged for the examination of various classes of its policyholders and is extending this privilege every year.

In the first 6,000 policyholders examined, a remarkable lowering of mortality occurred. Instead of 303 deaths in the five and one-half years subsequent to the examination, only 217 occurred—a saving of 28 per cent. in the expected mortality.

It is not difficult to understand why this should happen. Many of the policyholders who had been examined did not know that they were impaired. They took the advice of the physicians seriously; they followed instructions and thereby averted serious trouble.

The great waste of life that still prevails can be prevented. If people will make an annual inventory of their physical condition and will follow the advice of trained physicians and live hygienically, they will add whole years to their working lives.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will be glad to mail you, without charge, a booklet entitled, "An Ounce of Prevention". It will help you in guarding that most precious possession—your health.

HALEY FISKE, *President*

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Biggest in the World, More Assets, More Policyholders, More Insurance in force, More new Insurance each year

Adventure

January 30 1924

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A New Serial—Three Complete Novelettes

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON did not live to tell it, but another writer, with the approval of Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson's literary executor and representative, has undertaken to give us the story of how *Flint's* treasure came to be on Treasure Island. *John Silver, Pew, Ben Gunn*—you meet them all again in a story of sea adventure, stirring in itself and twice rich for their presence. Working and fighting with *Silver* in this earlier venture was the sinister "*Captain Rip-Rap*," pirate and dreamer of Jacobite dreams. Their adventures are given in "PORTO BELLO GOLD," a five-part story of the Spanish Main, by Arthur D. Howden Smith, beginning in the next issue.

THE old sergeant knew that something was wrong when he landed in the Philippines and saw a white man in the charge of two native policemen. In spite of warnings he tried to do something for the derelict, for white supremacy was threatened; and in the night he heard whispers of uprising against the dominant race. "WHITE MEN STICK TOGETHER," a complete novelette in the next issue, by Barry Scobee.

CASSIDY didn't want trouble; when he saw it coming his way he stepped aside. But when he stepped into town that morning and saw a fixed jury refuse to deal justice out as it should be, he hitched his belt up. And that meant trouble—trouble for the sheriff, the judge, and, amongst others, the slick detective for the Cattlemen's Association. "CASSIDY TROUBLES TROUBLE," a complete novelette of the cattle country by Frederick J. Jackson, in the next issue.

IN THE ghost house in the Kanaka village is something which skipper and mate, enemies, need to settle their feud. To get it they must brave the spears of the savages and a killing voyage in an open boat. "MARTY'S BONES," by J. D. Newsom, is a complete novelette of the South Seas in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure

THE WITCH OF ALEPPO

A COMPLETE NOVEL

by Harold Lamb

JAN. 30 1924 VOL XLIV N°6

Author of "Men from Below," "The King Dies," etc.

I

IN BARRACKS

When the storm comes, the snow pigeon takes refuge in the earth, but the wild goose flies south.

When the sun is warm, the snow pigeon soars into the air, but the wild goose wings its way to the gray north.

SNOW was falling that evening in December, when the year 1613 of Our Lord was drawing to its close. A sighing wind from the open steppe swept the drifted snow from the roofs of the barracks and sent it swirling along the parade ground of the Siech, the war encampment of the Cossacks.

White, whirling devils leaped and vanished in front of the yellow squares that were the horn windows of the *kurens*, the long, log barracks.

Few windows showed a light in the Siech because only a skeleton army was encamped there. A few hundred Cossacks held the border post where thousands should have been, on the island upon the icy breast of Father Dnieper—the river which, in that war-ridden generation, marked the boundary between Christian Europe and the growing empires of the Moslems.

And these Cossacks were angry as the dark and bitter storm that, rising in the limitless wastes of the steppe, held them in its grip. For one thing it was Christmas Eve, and not a full jar of tobacco or a keg of spirits was within the palisade of the camp to lighten the hours before dawn.

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"Eh—eh!" The *sotnik* who had brought in the men shook his head. "Such a night. The forest yonder is snapping its fingers, like the bones of the dead. It is good that we are not in the open."

"Aye, so," muttered another, setting his back to the wind, "because there are certainly devils abroad in the air. I could smell witches' oil, where I stood. And a dwarf came up from behind a log and pulled my coat, crying, just like a child in pain——"

"Evil times," assented a warrior who lacked a coat and leaned his spear against his shoulder to hold his fists the closer to the blaze. "Tomorrow——"

"Tomorrow," broke in the captain curtly, "is a holy day, and the vampires and hobgobs will all bivouack under the earth."

"I heard a maiden's voice singing in the tree tops, and her dark hair flew over my head like this smoke. If we had a priest in the camp such things would not be, but we have no priest."

"*Ai-a*," assented the man without a coat, "our fathers, the elders, hold council in the church. Eh, they can not sprinkle us with holy water. Our *batko*, the priest, went down the river to shrive a sick wench. A Turkish patrol found him and sent him back——"

"With the soles of his feet cut off," nodded the officer grimly. "Aye, they fitted him out with a pair of red slippers. That is how they sent him back to us."

They glanced with one accord toward the low structure of logs and mud where the body of the priest now lay awaiting burial. Only the *sotnik* looked thoughtfully at a near-by hut without a light. This was the quarters of the *koshevoi*—the chief of the Cossack war bands. And it was empty because the Siech lacked a leader as well as a priest.

Rurik, called the "Fair," a one-eyed veteran of many wars, had been the chief of the Cossacks. During the hard campaign of last Summer when the frontier had been over-run by the Turks from Constantinople, Rurik had been taken prisoner. After being paraded in chains before the Sultan he had been set to work with the other Christian slaves and a demand for ransom sent to the Siech. And the demand was for more than a king's ransom—ten thousand gold sequins.

So the temper of the Cossacks who had remained at the Siech was savage, because in all the wide steppe of the Ukraina there was not such a sum in gold. The Jews, with a shrewd eye to the hazard, refused to lend it, though promised half the spoil taken by the Zaporoghians in their raids for the next few years.

To the men of the patrols who tried to forget the gnawing of hunger in the glow of the fire, the death of the priest was a worse misfortune than the loss of their leader. But the captain knew that without a strong hand to lift the baton of a chief, the unruly clans of the steppe would never hold their own against the Moslems.

So long as Rurik lived, no new *koshevoi* could be elected. Besides, it was unthinkable for Cossacks to forget the ties of brotherhood and leave Zaporoghians to be flayed alive by the Turks. Rather, they would consent to have the Syrian and Jewish merchants spit upon their mustaches.

Nothing remained for them but to find the ten thousand pieces of gold. Constantinople was too strong to attack, and as for ventures upon the seas—the Turks and the Barbary *beys* were masters there.

"We can not ransom the *koshevoi*," the captain mused, "yet if we do not keep faith with our father, all the warriors of the world will point at us and say there is no faith in the brotherhood of the Cossacks. And how is that to be endured?"

"Easier if we had vodka and gruel," said mournfully the man who lacked a coat.

"Or if the *batko* were here to start a carol. Eh, he had such a fine throat—like a brass funnel it was, for the wine that went down and the songs that came up."

They threw more wood on the fire and pressed closer moodily, leaning on their spears, for no one wished to be the first to break away to a dark shed to try to sleep upon an empty stomach this Christmas Eve.

"If we had an *ataman*—a colonel like Khlit of the Curved Saber," muttered the *sotnik*, "who could open up a road for us to follow! By Saint Nicholas, we would find a ransom and weigh it out in blood."

"It was otherwise in those days," nodded a veteran who had traveled long roads with Khlit and Rurik. "Now the brothers do nothing but chew sunflower seeds, and when they hear that noble Cossacks are burned alive by the Turks——"

"To the —— with you!" growled the captain.

"—they spit out the sunflower seeds."

Anger, like the dull wrack of the clouds overhead, settled upon the men by the fire, and the last thing to come into their thoughts was that they should actually have a feast that Christmas Eve, or that songs would be heard in the camp.

THE door of the church opened and a Cossack emerged, wrapping the collar of his *svitza* about his ears. As he passed by the fire the men who had come in from patrol glanced up, with a vague hope, but saw that it was only the Scribe's orderly.

"Some one back yonder," he jerked a thumb toward the church where the council of elders sat, "is mad as a werewolf. Such a night, and a war party is ordered out!"

"What *kuren?*" demanded the captain.

"And they must send *me* to rout out those —— of Don Cossacks."

The messenger shook his head sourly, and passed on, the lanthorn in his hand flickering as it swung beside his bowed legs. The men from the Don country were said to take after their leader, Demid, who was a sword slayer, and a falcon.

"Eh, they will be at home upon the snow road this night," he thought, "because what is not Gipsy or Tatar or brimstone in their blood is akin to the witches."

Unnoticed by the Scribe's orderly and the others, a figure came out of the open door of the church and moved after him. This was a man so tall he had to stoop to pass under the lintel, and he walked with the swaying gait of one who had spent the better part of a lifetime in the saddle.

Their course took them by the high palisade, open to the weather, where prisoners were penned. Hearing a muttered curse hurled after the orderly's light the giant paused in his stride. But what mattered the storm to condemned men who would know the feel of a rope around their necks or the icy embrace of Father Dnieper before another day dawned?

They passed the empty stalls, once occupied by dram-shop keepers. Too well the camp followers had probed the leanness of the purses in the Siech. True, the wide Cossack steppe was fertile, but the villages had been reduced to burnt posts sticking up in the snow, the harvests had been garnered by the Turks, the horse herds thinned by Tatar thieves, and the cattle were dying off from lack of fodder.

Gaining the lee of the last barrack shed, apart from the others, the messenger kicked open the door.

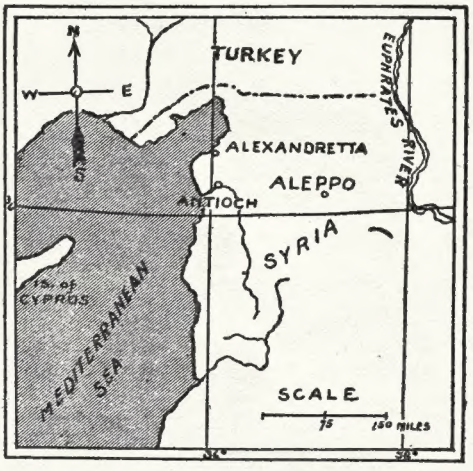
"An order, good sirs—" he began, with misgivings.

Abusive shouts interrupted him at once—

"May the dogs bite you!"

"Close the door, you son of a jackal!"

"You have been swilling the sacred wine, now that the priest is dead. As God lives,



you think you are our colonel, to give us an order!"

"No, he is looking for his own quarters, the gallows-pen—what evil business are you about, 'Bandy Legs'?"

Sitting in groups about smoking fires some three-score warriors were casting dice on scraped hides or matching each other at odd and even. Overhead, hung to the rafters, black sheepskin coats were steaming, and the reed-strewn clay that served as a floor was littered with bear and wolf skins.

In the corners lay men nursing wounds, the evil aroma of short clay pipes filled with Turkish tobacco mingling with the smoke of damp wood and half-dried horse-dung. They were bearded and dark-skinned. Several bore the purple scars of recent sword-cuts on cheek and forearm—big-boned fellows, taller than the usual run of Cossacks. The orderly noticed that no gold or silver lay on the gaming boards, and that only the wounded were smoking. Tobacco was in scant supply here, as elsewhere in the Cossacks' camp.

"Sabers and saddles, my turtle doves!"

he chuckled. "With saddles and sabers for relish, if the fare likes you not. You take the snow road this night."

"You lie, dog-face!" snarled one of the nearest.

Plucking a half-burned barrel-stave from the fire, he advanced threateningly on the soldier.

"Satan would not stir out of hell this night. I'll singe your beard, you hyena——"

The *essaul*, the sergeant, loomed up, stripped to the waist. Under his white skin his heavy biceps swelled, and the unlucky orderly paled visibly.

"Nay, 'tis an order, good Togrukh."

"Whose order? Our *sotniks* are dead, and our *ataman*, our colonel, is up the river. Who gives an order to the Don regiment?"

Togrukh reached out and gripped the orderly's beard, swinging the smouldering board with his free hand to keep the flames going. His white teeth gleamed through the tangle of a black mustache.

"So, good sir," he growled, "the noble elders would like to give an order to the men from the Don, eh? They sent you, shrinking rose-vine, and you came, lovely little flower!"

"The rose-bud came, the lovely little flower," chanted the warriors gleefully.

Togrukh was about to apply his brand when the giant figure in a wolf skin *svitza* entered behind the orderly, stooping as he did so to clear the lintel.

"Are your saddles oiled?"

He glanced up at the pegs on which a hundred saddles perched, each one different from the rest, but each ornamented in some way, worked with silver, or gold coins, covered with flowered silk. All were in good order.

"Your sabers cleaned? Have you boots, a pair to each man? Are they whole?"

To every question the moody Togrukh nodded, puffing at an empty pipe, his handling of the messenger suspended for the moment.

"All is as it should be, Colonel Ayub," he muttered. "The forehead to you, colonel. We did not know you were here."

"That is evident," grinned Ayub.

He had a good-natured, muscular face. His black eyes, set far apart, scanned the assembly without anger. The warriors surveyed him with equal interest, dwelling upon the mighty barrel of his chest, and the two-foot handle of the broadsword strapped to his back. This weapon was unique in the Siech, for Ayub had taken it from a German man-at-arms and had used no other weapon since. He alone of the free Cossacks could cut a cross in the air with the fifty-pound blade held in one hand.

Moreover the *ataman* Ayub was a *kunak*, a good fellow. They called him colonel although he had never commanded a regiment; instead he had been in more scrapes than an eel out of water. Togrukh and his mates knew that Ayub's ribs had been burned black over the brazier of a Turkish torturer, and a pound or so of his three hundred-weight consisted of grape-shot in the chest and thighs from a Polish culverin. Because of his reputation for nosing out trouble as a hound scents a hare, he never lacked for followers among the Cossacks.

"Ayub," said the stolid Togrukh, "we know that you are the comrade of the falcon, our colonel. As God lives, you are a very brother to him, and that is good. But what is this about an order? We have no officers in the camp. If you had not come we would have pricked this swollen bladder—" he spat at the orderly—"for bidding us to our sabers this night. Doubtless the Scribe wants the life let out of the prisoners in the pen, and it is always the Don regiment that is summoned when a dog's work is to be done."

"If the falcon, your colonel, gave an order would the *Donskoi* obey?"

An angry mutter went up from the listeners, who plainly considered themselves affronted by this remark.

"Aye," responded Togrukh, who was the only surviving non-com, "if we obeyed not—there would be terror."

"Then," Ayub assured him, "there will be terror if you do not obey now. Demid, your chief, is here in the camp. He rode in at vespers and is at talk with the grayheads in the church. He gave the order."

"Allah!" Togrukh shot one threatening glance at the orderly who had failed to mention this all-important fact, and reached up to jerk down his fur-lined great-coat. "On your feet, dog-brothers!" he barked over his shoulder at his mates who were scrambling into coats, boots and belts.

"Thirty of you, only!" commanded Ayub. "Two tens with lances, one ten to go to the supply shed, to be issued fire-locks with powder-horns, matches and bullet sacks. The rest to the stables, to rub down the

horses with hay. Two horses to a man, and double saddle bags."

A raw-boned oldster, donning a second shirt, looked up with interest.

"The forehead to you, *ataman!* That means a long ride: do we go far?"

"Far, 'Broad Breeches.'" The Don warrior wore, tucked into his boots, a pair of leather pantaloons, wider than any other in the camp, as Ayub noticed admiringly.

"With Father Demid, good sir?"

"With young Demid, and me, dog-brother."

"That means sword strokes." The veteran seemed satisfied. "It may be we shall frolic with the Moslem patrols, eh, sir brother?'

"It may be." Ayub, usually talkative enough, was strangely reticent. "Take what you must have for a journey of some moons, but sparingly. Do not saddle the beasts now. There will be drinking before we mount. Togrukh, when your men are equipped report to the *ataman*, Demid, at the church.

With that he went out of the barracks. Almost as he closed the door, the thirty warriors stood clothed and armed for the road. Taking the first saddle-bags that came to hand they began to ransack the various belongings of the barracks, without thought for the question of ownership. One youth tucked a short *balalaika*, a guitar, into his sack, along with flint and steel and a costly ikon—a holy picture set in a jeweled frame.

Broad Breeches—he of the two shirts—took a plentiful stock of tallow, long needles, a hunting-knife and the best of the woolen leg-wrappings lying about. Togrukh surveyed this stock with approval and gathered together a similar one for himself. Tongues were loosened, and the wounded who were to be left behind speculated upon the possible destination of the war party. The orderly could not enlighten them, but added that they were to get from the wagon-master a sledge load of tar and a dozen axes.

"Boats!" growled the oldest Cossack. "Hide of a hundred devils! May I roast in a brazen bull if we are not going to build long skiffs."

"But, Broad Breeches," objected the youngest of the party, "the Dnieper is frozen deep."

"I can't help it, 'Girl Face,' if Father Dnieper is solid."

The veteran knotted up the mouth of his sack and selected a lance to his liking.

"It must be that we are going upon an ocean," he added thoughtfully.

"How, an ocean? Where is there an ocean near the Siech?"

A roar of laughter from the Don men greeted this evidence of ignorance. The veteran, his tall black hat stuck upon one side of his shaven skull, grinned under his mustache.

"Eh—eh! His mother's milk is still wet on his lips, the little swaddled one!"

"The little swaddled one!" echoed Togrukh with relish.

"Why," added one of the disabled, offering his pipe to Togrukh, "all the oceans of the north must be frozen, or some such thing. So as God lives, sir brothers, you are going to the Black Sea, to the south."

"Or the White* or the Red," put in the veteran, moving about nimbly.

"Black, White or Red," muttered the orderly sullenly, "you will roast in that brazen ox, and the Turks will put your ashes in their gardens, Broad Breeches, before you come back to the Siech. The *ataman*, Demid, brought down the river from Kudak on two sledges kegs of brandy and vodka. Where there is a great revel before the march," he concluded sagely, "few warriors come back from the trail."

Togrukh, more and more pleased with events, glanced around to assure himself that the thirty were ready. Confronting the orderly he put his hands on his hips and swelled out his chest.

"By the shadow of the cross, our *ataman* is a falcon, a golden eagle. He soars high—he sees far! Brandy *and* vodka! What a night this will be! And you, you goose, said naught of what was important in your orders. *Hei*, brothers—pluck the goose, pluck the goose!"

In spite of the resistance of the scribe's orderly, he tore the coat from the man, and swung him around to the oldest Cossack, who, waiting alertly, tripped up the messenger and jerked off his boots as he struggled to rise. Then, jumping about like a gamecock, the experienced Broad Breeches planted his booted foot on the victims buttock's and sent him reeling toward the young warrior who ripped off his bag trousers.

*The Sea of Mamora.

"Singe the goose, singe the goose!" several began to cry.

Clad only in his shirt, the unfortunate orderly was whirled about until he was dizzy; then he was knocked down into the embers of the largest fire. Shouts of laughter greeted his efforts to scramble out of the hot coals, and an odor of burning skin was perceptible. His shirt-tails blazing, and his beard smoking, the messenger howled and tried to run toward the door, but his dizziness drove him against the walls instead, until Togrukh thrust him through the open portal into the snow.

Then, followed by the loud good wishes of the sick and disabled, the Don warriors tramped out, some to go for arquebuses, some to stack lances in the stables and rub down the shaggy ponies, but all with an eye to where, in the center of the muster ground, the dark figures of the patrols off duty were gathered around certain great kegs standing in the snow close to the red glow of the bonfire.

IN THE log chapel where lighted candles stood under the painted pictures of Christ and Mary, the deliberations of the council had come to an end. The score of gray-haired warriors had laid aside their tall *kalpacks*, the black Cossack hats with red tops, and stood, in stained ermine coats, and costly sable cloaks about an open grave, dug in front of the altar.

They looked at one another questioning, the steam of their breathing rising in the cold air. In a rough coffin on which rested his square cap and gold-embroidered stole, lay the body of the *batko*, the priest of the Cossack camp, and they were wondering in what manner they should bury the holy man who had so often performed the ceremony for their brethren but now was past doing it for himself.

"It is well," spoke up one *ataman*," that the good father should be planted here. This, sir brothers, was his camp and from it he sallied forth whenever the drums rolled for battle."

With that, several, led by the judge and the scribe of the camp, laid hold of the box and lowered it into the grave. Then they drew back and others came forward with shovels to fill in the grave to the level of the earthen floor.

"A thousand fiends fly away with you!" remonstrated Ayub. "Would you plant the *batko* without prayer or bell?"

"Do you manage the prayer. You were ever glib with your tongue."

Ayub glanced around uneasily, and was greeted with a murmur of assent. His broad face grew red with the unaccustomed effort of thought, and, mechanically, he unsheathed the broadsword, to lean on its hand-guard. The other Cossacks waited hopefully with bowed heads. All at once the big warrior cleared his throat and raised his eyes.

"O Father and Son in Heaven," he began in his deep voice, "this *batko* of ours was a good comrade. He never took another man's bread or silver and what he had of his he gave with an open hand so that now, when he has turned up his toes, we had to bury him in a winding-sheet made of a Turkish turban cloth, so little had he in the world."

The judge nodded, his eyes closed, as if he himself could not have expressed the matter better.

"This *batko* of ours," went on Ayub, "had a hardy soul. May I never taste corn-brandy again if it didn't stick to his body all the time he was walking back to his comrades, after the Turks had sliced his feet. And now, sir brothers, it has taken wings, this soul of our comrade and it has gone to sing before the seat of the Mother of God, and we will never hear him shout—*U-ha* again. No, he will never ride forth with us again."

He paused to lift his hand.

"If he could talk to us now, sir brothers, what would he say? Not a word of himself. But he would point to the holy images that have not a garment to their backs, or a candle to burn before them. That is what he would do. And what is our answer?"

The elders who were not quick-witted, looked up expectantly.

"Why, we will go down the path of the *batko*, that bloody path. And for each drop of blood upon it we will cut down a Moslem; we will carry the sword across the Black Sea, and bring back silver and gold for this altar. May the fiend take me, if we don't."

"Glory be to the Father and Son!" cried one of the warriors.

"For the ages of ages!"

While earth was being thrown on the coffin some one remembered the bell and

from the church tower the chimes of Christmas rang forth. Ayub, rendered thirsty by the long oration, sallied out with the councillors to the wine kegs that had made their appearance on the muster field.

II

THE GALLOWS BIRDS

WHEN the bells of the church ceased ringing the snow no longer fell, and it was seen that the center square of the Siech was filling rapidly with warriors from the barracks. Although the muster-drum had not been beaten, the orderly of the camp scribe had had a thrashing at the hands of the Don men, and his tongue was loosened.

The cooks were kicked up, grunting, and kindled fires under still warm caldrons wherein were quarters of sheep and sides of beef; as if they had been summoned by the drum, the older warriors appeared and headed for the casks, wiping their mustaches. In their hands they bore beakers and nuggins and broken dippers, and soon the gurgle of corn-brandy was heard as clearly as the crackle of the flames, where fresh fires were sending sparks whirling up toward a cold and star-lit sky.

The more inexperienced who came late were fain to gather the liquor in caps or cupped fists; and the youngest of them were sent to pull down the stalls of the Jews to throw on the flames. Soon a dense throng of warriors gathered around the *balalaika* players and the six-foot youngsters who were beginning to dance the Cosachka on the hard-packed snow.

They leaped and crouched by the red flames, casting off their long coats, their scalp-locks flying in the wild swing of the dance of the Ukraina, and the watchers put hands on hips and moved booted feet restlessly as the rhythm of it got into their veins.

They asked the *sotnik* who had been first on the scene how the vodka and brandy had come hither.

"On the *ataman's*—Demid's—sledges. He drove down the river in the storm, from Kudak where he had been to bend the forehead to Ileana, granddaughter of Rurik. Eh, he must be hot with wine, for he promised the maid he would find ransom for Rurik."

Beating in the head of a fresh cask with a smith's hammer, the officer added reflectively:

"He has called a squadron of the Don men to horse, and he will not take more than that. Because he says we others are ox-tails, fit to beat at flies, and he is going south, beyond the frontier."

"Where, then?"

"To the —— most likely, because he is young and mad. He will not say how, since there are spies in the Siech."

"Spies? Not to be thought of!"

"Well, the Sultan has eyes and ears north of the frontier, by which he knows our strength and our plans. How else did they cut us up last Summer and truss up Rurik like a sheep."

There was no answer to this, and the warriors began to sample the new keg. Always when a war party went out, they had a carouse, and the setting out of the *Donskoi* was apt to be memorable. The wailing of the fiddles rose against the note of the wind, and the thudding feet of the dancers. Word came presently from the church that the priest had been buried and they hastened to drink off a cup to the sturdy brother who had left them.

"Colonel Ayub had sworn he will bring back new garments for the images and jewels for the ikons. What days! Our church is like a jackal's hole——"

"Aye, and the Turkish mosques shine like harlots——"

"That is not the worst of it, sir brothers. These mosques, what are they? May the fiends spit on me if they are not Christian churches taken by the Moslems, who rubbed out the holy pictures on the walls. So it is with Saint Sophia, in the Imperial City,* so it is with the Holy Sepulcher."

They muttered angry assent, hanging their heads, for the Cossacks were seldom free from brooding; their moods were born of the great steppe, grim in the long Winter, palpitating and mirthful in the brief Summer.

"What days!" assented the sotnik, glaring about him. "Even in the Siech a war party must set out at night, or spies would bear word to the Sultan. And now that Demid is setting forth, who is there to smoke out the spies?"

"Let us make Demid our *koshevoi!*" shouted one of the dancers. "Even a wolf

*Constantinople.

can not hunt without a head. Give us the sword-slayer for a leader!"

"Aye, he is a sword-slayer," admitted the *sotnik*, "the finest to be found in the frontier. But he was only weaned a few Winters ago; along the Dnieper he kept his feet, true enough, and his enemies were laid to rest on their backs. But where are his gray hairs, where his Cossack cunning?"

"May the dogs bite you!" Broad Breeches pushed through the throng. "You are brave enough when words are in the air; but as God is my witness no man can find you when swords are out. You drink the falcon's vodka, and that gives you a little courage——"

"Death to you!"

"The lie to you, ox-tail! Did not Rurik betroth his granddaughter, Ileana of Kudak, to our falcon? He found no better man than Demid, and who says otherwise will cover himself with his legs."

The officer stood his ground sturdily, although the snarling face of the Don warrior was thrust close to his eyes.

"What I say," he maintained, "is known to all the brethren. Your chieftain is a hero, but he is a wild one, a mad-cap. At Kudak a white-armed maid awaits him, like a dove. But he takes the snow road, beyond the frontier, and leaves the castle of Kudak without a master."

Broad Breeches laughed tauntingly.

"Is that otherwise than a Cossack would do? I say Demid will bring back a mighty treasure, enough to ransom all the captives!"

The eyes of the other brightened for an instant; then he shook his head.

"It can not be. At this season the storms are on the Black Sea, and our boats would founder; the large treasure-ships of the Turks stick to the southern shore, as fleas stick where a dog can't scratch."

"Then he will seek the southern shore!"

"How, seek it, when no one of you knows a rudder from a centerboard, or a compass from a Nurenburg watch?"

The *sotnik* took his hand from his sword hilt and turned to the listeners:

"It is true that Demid is mad. If he could lead a horde without falling into the pagan's traps—if he could take a walled city, or outwit one of those accursed pashas of the janizaries—if he were a wolf like Khlit who could catch a Tatar khan asleep, or Rurik who could take a ship through the Dardanelles——"

"He can, you toad!"

"Then let him show how he can! If he does, he will be our *koshevoi*, and we will not say that he is young and mad."

Some murmurs of assent greeted this, and the Don warrior had no answer to the argument.

"Too much talk, too much talk altogether," he muttered angrily. "Out of the way, old women: stand aside dishcloths, that a man may drink!"

Elbowing aside the other Cossacks who did not resent his hard words, as the warrior was going on the road, the man from the Don gained the side of the nearest keg, refusing all proffers of beakers and dippers.

"Hail to the fair young mistress," he roared, throwing back his head, "the round-armed, the soft-eyed maiden! Hail to her whose embrace is the warmest, whose kiss awaits a Cossack——"

"To Lady Death!" echoed the *sotnik*.

At this Broad Breeches plunged his head in the cask, and sprang up, panting, shaking the liquor from his long scalp-lock, not quite oblivious to the admiring glances of the younger brethren.

The pent-up passions of the throng sought an outlet and one offered in the prison pen. Two criminals had been confined there, awaiting execution: one for striking the priest some time since—the other for the lesser matter of knifing a Cossack. The men of the Siech were accustomed to fighting, but they used their fists. To draw a knife was held to be a shameful act, natural enough for a Greek or Syrian, but contrary to the ethics of Cossackdom.

Warriors were already beating down the gate when the party from the brandy-cask came up. Axes appeared at once, and made short work of the beams of the door, so that a black gap showed in the high palisade. Torches flickered above the heads of the crowd and voices shouted for the gallows birds to come out.

Before a second summons could be uttered, a tall man walked through the gate. So singular was his appearance that for a moment it distracted the attention of the throng. His head, wrapped in a crimson scarf, did not come to the level of the long Cossacks, but he carried himself erect, and walked slowly forward, eyeing his captors. One eye, in fact was half-closed by a scar that ran down to his lip, lifting it in a kind of perpetual sneer. Instead of the usual

Cossack coat he wore a flowing *khalat*, with a velvet vest, heavily sewn with silver ornaments. His yellow boots were high and good—the heels painted red.

"What bird is this?" demanded the *sotnik*.

" 'Tis Balaban, Captain Balaban, the Levantine," a voice made response.

Whether Levantine, or man from Barbary, no one knew or cared; it was known that he had once been aboard the Barbary corsairs, and had gone into the service of the Turks for a while, until he had fled the galleys, and, professing Christianity, had been received into the asylum of the Siech. He it was who had knifed a Cossack, and he had done it expertly.

"Aye," his voice rang out shrilly for such a powerful man, " 'tis Captain Balaban, at your service, my *kunaks*. Do you wish entertainment—then I will give it!"

"As the fiend sired you, that you will, 'Wry Mouth!' "

Hands seized him and voices cried out for the other prisoner, who had struck the priest.

This was a man as broad as Balaban was tall, a man of swarthy face, who rolled forward as if treading the moving deck of a ship. His tiny black eyes flickered around, seeking in vain some avenue of escape, but his roaring voice showed that he had a steady nerve.

"Aye, sir brothers! Ostrog is present—Ostrog who burned the pagan galley off the Chersonese. What is your will, with Ostrog?"

"That you burn, Ostrog—that you burn!" Laughter greeted this sally. "You will make a rare candle—after you are tarred. To the tar barrels!"

So cried those at the outer fringe of the throng. The Barbary captain had been walking slowly about the ring, staring into the bronzed faces, apparently utterly indifferent to what was in store for him. Of a sudden his right arm shot out and he ripped from its scabbard the *yataghan* of a young warrior.

With the slender, curved weapon in his hand, he leaped back, to stand against the palisade, his eyes fairly blazing with malignant fury. From under his twisted lip flowed such a stream of sheer blasphemy that the nearest Cossacks stood transfixed. Whatever oaths their lips might utter, they were religious at heart. The Levantine knew well how to arouse them to use steel on him and to forget the torture.

Ostrog, slower of wit, took advantage of the pause to catch up one of the fragments of the door beams and take his stand beside Balaban.

"Cut, slash!" roared the *sotnik* finding his tongue.

Sabers slithered out of sheaths and the throng surged forward. Balaban fell silent, his blade poised, dangerous as a coiled snake. But between him and the nearest warriors stepped a youth who had pushed through the crowd unheeded. He was bare-headed, and in his shirt-sleeves, and the *sotnik*, seeing him, spread out both arms and thrust back against the men behind.

"The *ataman*, Demid, is here, brothers."

THE chief of the Don men waited until a space had been cleared behind him—waited patiently, his gray eyes studying Balaban.

"Back you dogs," muttered the non-coms within sight of the colonel. "Do not tread on his heels—see how his head steams! The sword-slayer has been licking up vodka, with the wounded in the Don barracks. See, he is going to play with Captain Balaban. Stand back, you sow's ears!"

"Father," Broad Breeches addressed his chief, "shall we drop lassos over their sconces, and truss them up? I have a rope."

Demid paid no attention to the man. His brows, curving down over deep-set eyes, his sharp aquiline nose, his skull shaven, except for the scalp-lock—in the glow of the torches these features did somewhat resemble a falcon. Although he had been drinking heavily he did not sway on his feet as he confronted the Levantine.

Then Ostrog hurled his timber, at the young Cossack. Demid sank on one knee, bending his head as the heavy club whirled over him, but his eyes did not leave Captain Balaban. His simitar flashed out as the tall man cut down at him with the *yataghan*.

The two blades clashed and Demid parried, rising to his feet as he did so. To the onlookers it seemed as if the weapons merged into a flowing stream of light, so swiftly did Balaban, who had determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, press the attack, crouching, his teeth gnashing together. He could use a cutlas well and,

under the flowing *khalat*, his supple muscles were like steel.

Demid's right arm moved only from the elbow, and—without indulging in the whirlwind sword-play of the Cossacks—he rested his weight on his left leg.

"Raise your weapon, Balaban," he said suddenly, shifting his weight to his forward foot and engaging the other's blade at close quarters.

The Levantine's answer was a snarl that changed to a grunt as he found the handguard of the *yataghan* caught against Demid's hilt and the two blades wedged together. In spite of his efforts to free his sword, he felt his weapon raised high over his head as the Cossack put forth his strength.

"Now lower it," ordered Demid, and this time his lips curved in a smile.

The two swords swept down in a wide arc, to the snow, and before Balaban could draw the *yataghan* clear the Cossack had planted his foot on it. Placing the hilt of his simitar against his chest, he moved forward until the point pricked the skin under the Levantine's lower ribs, over the vitals.

Perforce Captain Balaban released the hilt of his weapon and stepped back against the log pen. With nearly an inch of steel in him he stood quietly, without making a plea for his life.

"Have you heart, Balaban," asked the chief of the Don warriors in a low voice, "to go on a venture with me, over the black water? Will you go against the galleys of the Turks? Have you lust for the feel of gold and the light of jewels? We seek a treasure."

"Why not?" Balaban was surprized. "If I said nay, you would skewer me, so—why not, say I?"

"Your life will be short; I will see to that," Demid promised. "You know ships and their ways and the paths of the sea. I do not. If you go with me you will aid me to the utmost; but you will not be a slave. Some months of life you will earn for yourself, and Ostrog. Otherwise, seconds."

Balaban spat to one side, half closing his good eye. If the Cossacks were venturing on a raid of the Strait and Constantinople, he might fare badly. On the other hand, Demid had spoken of months in which to live. Balaban had been through enough tight places to be a fatalist. Much could happen in several months, particularly if he managed to get these Don Cossacks, who did not know one end of a galley from the other, into a sailing craft.

If luck favored him and he could lead the *ataman* into the hands of the Moslems, why then his reward would be great. No longer could he remain in the Siech, and here was a way out. A moment ago he was doomed to tar and fire, while now——

"Take your steel out of my guts," he growled. "I'm your man. Do you want me to swear an oath?"

"The ——," observed Ayub who had come up in time to hear the last remarks, "would leap up and laugh if you took an oath! Nay, Demid, evil will come of this gallant. I can face any man on a horse, but the sea is an unruly beast, look you—when it rears up there is no putting the whip to it."

"We need the pair of them, Ayub. Put them under Togrukh's wing; tell him he will walk to the Black Sea tied to the cart-tail if they escape. No blows for them, but death if a weapon is seen in their hands."

The Levantine shrugged. Under his breath he muttered a Turkish phrase—

"Time will have another story to tell."

Demid caught the words and understood, being familiar with the Turkish and Tatar dialects; but he held his peace. Withdrawing his sword point he wiped it on the Levantine's girdle. The Cossacks, suspecting that their prisoners were about to be taken out of their hands, swept forward with a mutter of anger.

"Back, dog-brothers," cried Demid. "These men are mine."

"Back, pot-lickers," repeated Balaban with a malevolent grin. "Back to your stoves, I say. We mean to wet our gullets, Ostrog and I."

Heedless of the uproar, he elbowed his way toward the wine casks, followed by the squat seaman, convinced of the truth that the warriots would not go against the word of Demid.

"He keeps his head up," remarked the young *ataman*, following the progress of the renegade with his eyes. "Noble blood is in him somewhere. *Hai*—the Pleiades are low, and dawn is near. We must be across the open ice of the river before light comes. It is time—time!"

"Time!" One of the Don men caught the word.

Balaban, standing at one of the open

casks, emptied a beaker of vodka down his throat and laughed, stretching his arms.

"Oh—time! Now for one bravo, now for another! A toast, Broad Breeches, to the fair courtesan, Luck! When we are gone, no one will drink."

With a stifled chuckle he picked a burning stick out of the fire and dropped it into the keg of liquor. Blue flame rushed up from the vodka and the Levantine laughed again.

From across the camp a deep voice began one of the Cossack chants—

"Glorious fame will come
To the Cossacks,
To the heroes,
For many a year,
Till the end of time."

III

THE STRAIGHT SWORD

WHERE the gray ice of the Dnieper began to shred away into cakes that drifted down the white fringes of the shore, a faint snow trail led north. A long this trail a sledge was making its way up-river.

Three steaming horses drew it onward at a round pace; a fur-clad Tatar, astride the off pony wielded his whip in response to an occasional word from the one occupant of the rude vehicle—a human being so wrapped in wolf-skins that only his eyes and sable cap could be seen. Behind, perched on the runners of the sledge was a shivering servant.

The bells on the shaggy ponies tinkled lustily, the postilion's whip cracked, the leather-bound runners wheezed as they flew forward. It might, indeed, have been the invisible thread of Destiny that drew forward the three men, so that, in rounding a corner of the trail, they came upon a detachment of Zaporoghian Cossacks who had been halted by the sound of the bells in the act of crossing the ice of the river at the point where it was still strong enough to bear horses.

They had halted in the trail, and they were the party that had been led south by Demid four days ago.

Seeing them, the Tatar muttered something of mingled astonishment and disgust, and reined his horses to one side, leaving the trail clear for the riders.

"By the Rood! Would ye step me aside, to give yon sons of perdition the road!"

Although spoken in a slow, musical voice, the words were barbed. Moreover they were good, round English words.

"Excellence," remarked the dragoman, a Circassian, by name Giorgos, as it proved, "the Tatar does well. These folk will not stand aside for us, and it is best not to stir them up."

"And Michael of Rohan will not yield the road to the Grand Monarch himself, at all. A pox on ye, George—gibber in their tongue and ask the question of them and we will make shift to answer."

Admonished in this fashion the dragoman seemed to hesitate, his smooth olive face puckered, and when he spoke it was in *Turki*. He addressed Ayub, removing his cap and bowing low; but it was Demid who made response, curtly. The Cossack chief noticed that the occupant of the sledge listened as if trying to follow the talk, although he was staring at Ayub curiously.

"George, clod," the traveler observed idly, "here is a giant, and—faith—they must be of the race of Gog and Magog. Mark ye, they sit their cattle well, with straight backs and Louis himself would not be ashamed of such dragoons—but what are they? Have we come to the edge of the habitated world, George—to the dwellers of Cimmerian darkness?"

The dragoman, occupied with his own fears, looked up reluctantly.

"Nay, excellence, these are Cossacks who are masterless men and bloody minded. Being here they are out of their bounds and so must be bent on evil."

"Blister me, George," objected the man in the sledge, "if they are not Christians, by token of those silver crosses they parade. Being Christians their officer will not draw the line at a friendly bout o' the blades."

Giorgos shivered.

"Sir Michael, the great ambassador of the Franks at Constantinople would whip me if harm comes to you. Be pleased to turn back ——"

"I despair," observed Sir Michael reprovingly. "Mark me—I am skeptical of your sporting instinct, George. Ye are sly, —— sly, and—did hear me request, nay urge, George, that ye translate to yonder officer my wish to cross swords for a moment, the winner to take the road?"

The Cossacks grinned broadly at the dragoman's interpretation of his master's desire, then they stared and reined closer

when the traveler swept aside his robes and sprang from the sledge. They beheld not a Muscovite or Turk but a slender figure, diminutive beside their towering bodies, in scarlet boots, buck-skin breeches and trim greatcoat. Out of a lean, mobile face blue eyes scanned them coldly, yet with a hidden glint of mirth.

But what stirred their ridicule were the black ringlets that fell from the plumed hat to the lace collar of Sir Michael of Rohan.

"Their weapons would snap your blade, excellence," muttered Giorgos.

"I warrant me," responded the traveler dryly, "ye have not seen a rapier at work."

Whereat he whipped from its scabbard of Spanish leather—a trifle worn, in truth—a straight, tapering length of steel that gleamed blue in the sunlight—a three-edged shaft of Toledo forging that he bent nearly double in his powerful fingers and released with a thin *hum*. It was not too long, the blade, and at its base it tapered to an inch in width where the hand-guard joined. And Sir Michael of Rohan laughed, for the blood was warm in his veins that morning, and it was his way to stand his ground when opposition offered.

Sir Michael, bending his blade between his fingers, studied Demid from under level brows noticing the lithe figure, half a head taller than himself, the long reach of the Cossack, the jeweled hilt of the curved simitar, and the silver cross at the warrior's throat.

"George, lad, say to the handsome bucko that I have no wish to draw blood; nay, at the third pass I will pluck out his neckcloth."

More than once he had matched weapons with the Moslems and he knew the infallibility of the straight blade in a hand such as his. Years of campaigning in Flanders and Italy had schooled him in his work. The *salle d'armes* in Paris had added finish to his skill; he had mastered the tricks of the Italian school, and men who had been so unlucky as to face him in duels had died. He was a *maitre d'escrime*, and so sure was he of the result of the coming encounter, he would have waged the sum of his possessions—if he had any—upon the third thrust. But his greatcoat was neatly mended in more than one place and his vest—Sir Michael sighed—his waistcoat was shabby, indeed.

Demid, on his part, smiled and, touching the green silk cloth around his throat, shook his head.

"*Garde-toi, mon sauvage!*" cried the traveler, bending his knees and sweeping the rapier overhead, releasing the tip as he did so.

The Cossacks urged their ponies around the pair eagerly, pleased at an unexpected entertainment. Demid saluted briefly with his simitar, and engaged at once, making a careless cut. It was warded.

Again the light blade of the simitar caressed the thin line of the rapier—then swept it aside and cut swiftly at the traveler's head. His blade passed through air; Sir Michael had drawn back, from his knees, and for two seconds Demid lost touch with him. In that time the Cossack felt a tug at his throat, a tiny burning of his skin as if a pin had passed across it.

Drawing back he beheld Sir Michael smiling, the green silk neckcloth resting on the tip of the rapier. The brows of the young Cossack drew together and the dark blood rushed into his face. To be tricked, like a buffoon—to be played with, like a puppy!

BEHOLDING the mask of anger that transformed the face of the chief, Sir Michael let the silk fall instantly and stood on guard, his left hand raised in the air behind his head, the point of his blade describing tiny circles.

Demid rushed as a Cossack attacks, with unrestrained, reckless fury. His simitar flashed around and over the rapier; steel slithered against steel; but always the thin blade was between the simitar and the body of the smaller man. It was Sir Michael now who was careful to keep touch with his enemy, content to rest on the defensive until Demid's fury had spent itself.

For a while he stood his ground; but Demid's strength did not exhaust itself. Instead, Sir Michael gave ground a little under the whirlwind slashes. He was breathing quickly, perspiration under his eyes, the corners of his lips smiling a trifle. His rear foot, exploring the uneven trail cautiously, felt deep snow, and his knees stiffened.

"No help for it," he muttered.

And with that he took the offensive. Demid, who had been startled out of his usual composure by the first thrust, yet felt the change in the touch of the rapier, and, turning the point of his saber down,

parried a lightning lunge at his side. Once more he was aware of the tiny pin point of fire, scraping his skin through the cloth.

Instead of making him wilder, this touch steadied the Cossack. His iron wrist served him well now, and in a dozen tries, the rapier failed to get home upon him. Sir Michael tried intricate feints—complicated passes that got the other's blade well to one side—but ever as he thrust, the light simitar warded in time. It was, to him, an exhibition of incredible quickness of hand and eye, for the Cossack was not familiar with such tricks of the sword, such rogueries of the blade.

" 'Swounds!" cried Sir Michael, wholeheartedly.

Barely in time, with numbed wrist, he had freed his blade from a twist of the simitar that would otherwise have sent it flying through the air. If the rapier had been a saber it would have been lost to him.

"Good lad," he panted, with a smile of acknowledgment.

Now the Cossack did not understand the words, but Sir Michael's smile was eloquent, and the glare passed from the eyes of the tall warrior, who sheathed his saber and sprang forward to pull his adversary to his chest and kiss him on both cheeks. The Cossacks, pleased with the sword-play, rose in their stirrups and shouted and the bout was at an end.

Yet the result was still a matter of uncertainty. Balaban muttered that the blade of the Frank was bewitched, and Demid, who was no believer in black magic, shook his head.

"Nay, the play was fair. Yonder Frank is my match. Twice he touched me and I marked him not. What man can he be?"

"No true man," put in Ayub, frowning. "He has curls like a Polish wench, and he is not big enough to amount to anything. Ho, dragoman, what has your master to say for himself?"

The Circassian pondered, his black eyes roving. Drawing closer to the Cossacks he said in a low voice:

"The lord, my master, is high in favor at the Imperial City. He has called you dogs, and bade me order you to stand aside and beat to him with the forehead* as he passes along the road."

Demid stopped in his tracks, surprized. Ayub, enraged, began to snort and clutch at the hilt of his broadsword. An expression of sullen triumph crossed the olive face of the Circassian, as Ayub controlled himself enough to demand a sight of their papers.

He took the strip of folded parchment that Giorgos drew from his girdle, glanced at the seal and the Turkish writing, and sniffed.

"As I live, though this scroll is a riddle to Christian eyes, the Sultan Mustapha has set his mark at the bottom. At least his seal is here."

Protesting volubly that the letter was a *seguro*—a safe conduct—Giorgos managed to whisper to Sir Michael, who was puzzled by the change in the temper of the Cossacks, that it was well the dogs could not read. Demid, who had been studying the open face of the traveler, took the parchment from Ayub and glanced at it, then scanned it a second time, thoughtfully.

"A safe conduct to Satan," growled the big Cossack. "This bird has strange plumage, and why is he here unless to do evil to Christians, if he bears a letter from the Turk?"

Demid folded up the missive again, his face inscrutable. Even Giorgos could not be sure if he had read the safe conduct or not.

"Time to break our fast," he observed, glancing at the sky. "Down from your ponies, *kunaks*. Start a fire and boil millet and mutton—chop a hole in the ice, Ayub. The detachment is in your hand until I come back."

Taking Sir Michael by the arm, and motioning for Giorgos to remain at the camp, Demid led the traveler aside to some rocks where he sat down and proceeded deliberately to light his clay pipe. Placing the black Turkish tobacco in the bowl, he laid a pinch of tinder on it and struck steel against flint until he ignited the tinder.

"This paper," he said abruptly in Turkish, "is sealed with wax, yet its true seal is blood. It is your death warrant."

Demid had full mastery of that tongue, and had seen enough to suspect Sir Michael knew more than a little of it, which proved to be the case.

"*Marash!* That is strange; what does the paper say? I can not read it."

"First," said Demid gravely, "tell me who you are, and your business here."

*To make the salaam, in oriental fashion.

IN BROKEN *Turki*, garnished with many a phrase from the slave-galleys, Sir Michael told his tale. A one-man Odyssey it was, of wandering, of warfare under different standards; yet most of all it was the tale of a restless spirit.

Chief of an Irish clan, Michael of Rohan was—schooled by a monk, one of the wisest of men, and taught by his father to handle weapons well. When James the First sent his deputies into Ireland, and the king's writ ran in the land, Michael went overseas to the French court. Here he sought his fortune in the wars, and won, instead, knighthood.

Embarking in a French corvette for Sicily, he fell foul of the Barbary corsairs, whose appetite for the plunder of Christian shipping had begun to sharpen. The corvette made a running fight of it and gained the harbor of Syracuse, into which the *polaccas* of Tunis followed. The pirates beat down the resistance of the mariners and made off with prisoners and spoil unmolested by the forts. Sir Michael was one of the last to fall into their hands, and it was long before he recovered from his wounds.

When he did, it was to be chained to a rower's bench with the other slaves of a Barbary galley. And he said little of the years that followed, or the shame of them.

Luck sent his galley with a shipment of Christian slaves to Constantinople. While anchored in the roads, off the Asian shore, Sir Michael won free of his chains, aided by a giant negro who told him where the foreign legations were located near the imperial *seraglio*, and the two decided to risk an attempt to escape. A long swim at night, across the Hellespont, ended the blackamoor; but Sir Michael evaded the patrols of janizaries and reached the gardens of the British embassy. He was not altogether a welcome guest, he admitted, because the discovery of an escaped slave of the Moslems in the house of the consul would have meant a fine of several thousand pounds, and perhaps imprisonment for the ambassador who lived, as it were, on the edge of a volcano.

Luck had not deserted him, for Sir Michael won at cards and dice the clothing that he now wore and the fair rapier. A mandate went out from the palace that all the legations were to be searched and any weapons found were to be taken from the foreigners. Even the duelling-pistols and the sword with which the English ambassador had been knighted were seized by the Turks, but the rapier of Sir Michael they did not gain.

Discovered and identified by his scars as an escaped galley-slave, the former cavalier of France presented the tip instead of the hilt of his weapon and won free to the harbor. After dark he had himself taken out to a Venetian bark that cleared for the Black Sea, having a favorable wind, at dawn, thus escaping search.

Running into a storm almost as it passed the twin rocks of the Bosporus, the bark was driven north for two days, eventually striking on a strange coast. At least it was so to Sir Michael, who, cast again upon the water, swam ashore with his servant, Giorgos. The two made their way to a small trading town at the mouth of a great river, and Sir Michael, learning that the frontier of Christian Europe was not many days' travel north, hired a sledge hoping to reach in time, the large towns of Muscovy—in spite of the objections of the Circassian who favored waiting for Spring and a ship back to Constantinople.

"*HAI*—it is clear that you are not a snow-pigeon," observed Demid. "You are a wild goose, flying to the north."

Most of the tale was meaningless to him, dealing as it did with kings and wars unknown to the Cossacks. But he was weighing in his mind not the story so much as the man who told it. There was truth in Sir Michael's eyes, and in the scars upon his hands. Demid knew well the marks of the slave-bench. Many Cossacks had felt the chains of slavery; many were now under the lash of the Turk slave master.

"How," he asked, "did the letter of safe conduct come into your hand?"

At the British embassy, Sir Michael explained, the Circassian who was hanging about the place had approached him and offered to obtain a general passport—for a small sum in silver. Giorgos had been absent on this business when the Irishman had his fight with the Turkish guards, but the dragoman, who had not been paid, found him aboard the bark.

Giorgos had carried the *seguro*, saying that he knew best when it should be shown.

Until his pipe was out, Demid thought this over. Then—

"I will read you the paper, *Ser Mikhail:*

" 'I, that am lord of lords, conqueror of Christiandom, King in Babylon and Istambul, governor of the holy cities of Damascus and Mecca—I give command to all pashas, governors and captains in my domain to slay the wandering dog who bears this letter and send his head to my court. The unbeliever is an escaped slave who hath lifted his voice against a true follower of the prophet. My favor to him who carries out my wish. The Circassian servant is to be trusted. Peace to him who directs his steps aright.—Mustapha.' "

To Demid's surprize Michael burst out in hearty laughter.

"The —— of a safe conduct!" he muttered to himself, and wondered whether he was to believe the Cossack; but there was no doubting the candor of the young chief.

"Your head—" Demid followed out his own train of thought—"Giorgos would have had it to bear back with him, if my sword had slain you. The jackal did not think that a Cossack could read, so he gave the paper and spurred it on with an insult. Who was this true follower of the Prophet?"

It was Sir Michael's turn to reflect. His countrymen, he explained, carried on a trade between Baghdad and Damascus by caravan, and recently they had been forced to give a third of their goods to a certain pasha—the Governor of Aleppo—to gain passage for the caravans.

The English ambassador at court knew of this, and Sir Michael had urged him to demand justice from the Sultan for the robbery. But the ambassador was afraid to act, aware that Sidi Ahmad, the pasha in question, was the favorite of Mustapha and the most powerful noble among the Moslems.

"There are eyes and ears hidden about the Imperial City," grunted Demid, "and they reach even to here. Have you been in Aleppo?"

Sir Michael shook his head.

"No Christian can pass the gates."

"Hearken, Frank: Have you a master? Whom do you serve?"

"Myself."

The adventurer shook his head slightly. English, French and Turkish monarchs, he had served them with his youth and he bore the scars of this service; yet faith in princes he had none.

"Good! We Zaporoghians are masterless men. Do you believe in God and Christ?"

"Aye, so."

"Then make the Sign of the Cross."

When the Irishman had done so, Demid nodded approvingly.

"We are on the trail of a treasure and a mighty one. It is a hard trail and a steep one, and not often will we breathe our horses. Join us, and you can claim a *solnik's* share in gold and silver, if we find what we seek. If we fail, you will not have a knightly death. Nay, you will taste fire or the stake."

For a full moment Sir Michael of Rohan studied the impassive countenance of the young chief, wondering a little at its dark beauty which was more than a woman's, being without fear or consciousness of self.

"No *rafik*, no road companion will I be, unless you make known to me the end of the road."

It was not Demid's liking to speak of his plans, and he was silent a while. Then, with the tip of his scabbard he drew a rough triangle in the snow and dotted the three corners, explaining that the one to the southeast was Baghdad, the one to the north, Trebisond, on the Black Sea, and the third Aleppo.

During this season in Midwinter, the caravan trade from India, Persia and Arabia came partly overland to the Euphrates, but mainly up that river, through Baghdad. Then—the passes of the Caucasus being under deep snow—it was born over the desert from Baghdad to Aleppo, thence to the ports in the Levant.

This flow of silks—even from China—ivory, woven carpets and worked leather, amber, jewels and cotton, spices and gold gave to the Sultan of the Turks his great wealth. Heretofore the Cossacks had sometimes raided the trading-galleys on the Black Sea, but they had never gone into the coast of Asia Minor, the stronghold of Islam.

Demid sought the value of ten thousand pieces of gold. Few cargoes were coming out of the port of Trebisond, from the northern corner of the triangle. He meant to make himself master of a seaworthy craft when they reached the sea-coast, and sail to Asia Minor.

Sir Michael shook his head.

"To win through to the caravans you would need to cross the upper passes of the Caucasus in Winter. Then, on the trade routes you would meet the wolf packs, the Kurdish and Arab robbers, out of the hills and desert. So the merchants of the

English say. The caravans are strongly guarded. You might cut one up, but then you would be hunted down——"

"We do not look for pickings from the traders."

"What, then? 'Tis folly for thirty and five to draw sword against the pasha of Asia."

"True, if we were an army. But we are five and thirty, and we will fight with the heels of our horses."

"You can not carry off gold pieces that way."

"Aye, if we put them first in our saddlebags."

Demid rose, the ghost of a smile touching his lips.

"It would be folly to sit in one place where the eyes of the Moslems are upon us."

He put his finger on the hilt of the Irishman's rapier. "You can use that. How would you thrust against a shrewder swordsman? Openly, at his throat?"

"Not so." Sir Michael smiled. "I would use my blade clumsily at first—as you did—and pass it under his guard when he struck."

Springing to his feet, he let his glance rove over the white sea of the snow-bound prairie, the glittering ribbon of the river, and the gray murk that hid the horizon on every hand, as if a shroud had been drawn around that particular spot on the earth. The loneliness of the vast spaces penetrated the spirit of the Irishman like a cold wind that could not be evaded, turn where he would.

To tell the truth, Sir Michael had no joy of this steppe that dwarfed the moors of his homeland, and he yearned for the fellowship of men.

Demid, towering over him, with arms knotted on a placid chest that hardly seemed to breathe, was at home here. The dark eyes of the young Cossack saw not the desolation of the prairie over which a raven circled on slow wings. His mind's eye saw the tall grass of the steppe under the warm sun, the smoke rising from wicker cottages by the beds of streams—a horse plunging, into a covert whither a stag had started up, and the rider of the horse shouting in exultation of the hunt.

He saw children playing by sleeping cattle, their ears attuned to the ceaseless murmur of the wind upon the prairie——

"I will go with you," said Sir Michael abruptly. "But I serve myself."

Demid nodded, pleased. He had added to his small company a rare swordsman.

"We bid you to our bread and salt," he accepted, gravely, the companionship of the other, and returned to Sir Michael his passport, remarking that it were better burned.

But the cavalier, being anxious to have a reckoning with his erstwhile dragoman, forgot about it. He found, on returning to the camp, that Giorgos was gone. When he asked Ayub how this had happened, the giant pointed to the hole that had been cut in the ice, adding that there was one spy the less in the world.

IV

AYUB CASTS A NET

"MAD is he, the Falcon—aye, and yonder his mate is mad."

So said Captain Balaban, whispering under his twisted lip as he watched Michael Rohan casting dice, one hand against the other. Michael shaded his eyes to look down upon the strip of beach and the dark line of the Black Sea.

The Cossack detachment had arrived at the shore and quartered itself upon a Tatar fishing village on the sheltered side of a long headland that stretched like a giant's finger out into the waters. The score of natives who lived on the neck of land had been rounded up and placed in the care of Togrukh, the *essaul*, who counted them promptly and let them understand that if one were found missing from the village the rest would be wrapped up in the great fishing-nets of twisted hemp weighted with stones, and dropped into the sea.

"I can read the signs in the sky," went on Balaban, who had discovered that Michael understood much *Turki* and could speak some. "When we rode at the heels of the Cossacks through the snow wilderness, spirits howled in our wake."

He glanced sidewise at Demid who sat near them, apparently asleep, his back against a side of a hut, his sword across his knees. The Cossack chief understood Balaban perfectly, and knew that the howling had been from bands of Tatars who had hit upon their trail at times and pursued, without coming up with the swift-moving warriors. The first stage of the journey had been made safely.

"Aye," resumed Balaban, "on horses the

brethren do well enough. If they could swim their beasts across to the Asia shore—" he laughed and continued—

"You have more wit than these Cossacks, and it is time you and I took thought for what the morrow would bring us, of evil or good."

Michael cast his dice and picked them up in the other hand. Never in his twenty-five years of life had he taken thought for the morrow. If he had!

Before his mind's eye appeared his home in the fens, the stone house with the thatched roof, the bare-footed, long-tressed maids who served him and his, the fold of the countryside listening to the prayers of the old priest—the mist of the sea, and within the house a glowing fire, a nuggin of spirits—talk of other days, over the clay pipes—a comfortable pension from the British king, who would have made him deputy over his clan. Peace and fulness of the body, yet sickness in the spirit.

A deputy, to administer the king's writ, upon his own people! Better the fortune of the road than that! Michael cast down the dice, his eyes somber.

Then his lips twitched and he laughed. For the first time he saw what the Cossacks on the beach were about. Ayub and some others were heating tar and plastering the sides of the half-dozen fishing skiffs with it. They had been gathering reeds from the salt marshes of the shore, and these they stuck into the warm tar, making a thick fringe upon the sides of the skiffs. Others were rolling up the heavy fishing-nets and laying them beside the boats.

The Levantine looked askance at the Irishman. A Moslem at heart, he considered himself the superior of Christians, who were savages and dolts—although the women of the Franks were fair and spirited. Balaban knew to a *dirhem* the price they fetched in the slave markets of the Turks, who sought them at some pains—so much for the dark-browed Greek women, so much for the pallid French. A high price for the Venetian maidens, who were better skilled at the guitar and the needle. Once he had sold a French duchess to the captain-pasha of the Turkish galleys in the Mediterranean. A good price, that.

So, a shrewd man, Balaban failed to weigh Michael well. He could not understand a spirit that laughed at the tarred reed skiffs and yet would set foot in the leaky and unseaworthy craft. Still, he felt his way with care, for he wanted something that Michael had—the safe conduct of the Sultan.

"Aye, they are mad," he said again. "I know them. Half a moon have we been here, resting on our heels, and their chief sits and looks at the sea. He has not a plan in his head."

Thinking that Demid was asleep, Balaban spat on the ground and shook his head.

"Why will not the Falcon tell his plan, if he has one? Did he hope to gain passage in a ship, so that he could raid into Asia? He has posted a look-out, yet the galleys, the *caiques* and the barkentines that have passed along this cursed strip are under command of the Turks."

"*Taib*," said Michael, in his broken Turkish. "True. What is that craft yonder?"

Against the gray of the sea and the blue of the late afternoon sky a two-masted galley was drawing up to the headland. Balaban had observed it long ago, but had seen fit to keep his knowledge to himself.

"A fast galley out of Constantinople, under oars," he said, squinting against the glare on the water.

"Why," asked Michael, "do these craft keep along shore?"

"The Equinox is long past, and the run across, from north to south, is against the prevailing winds—dangerous in this season. The Sultan's vessels are coasting."

Michael nodded; with his eyes shut he could vision what was happening as the black ship turned slowly into the half-moon of the protecting headland. It was customary when coasting to anchor at night in such a spot, and perhaps to go ashore for fresh water. But no boat put off from the galley, which now swung idly as the oars ceased moving and were lashed to the rowers' benches for the night.

The anchor splashed down, and the thick rope to which it was attached ran out through the trunnel-hole at the prow. On the high poop of the galley figures gathered under the canopy to gaze at the shore, and the setting sun picked out the red and green of caftans, the steel of helmet and spear-head.

Along the strip of bridge that ran the length of the vessel a turbaned figure walked, and Michael knew that one of the overseers of the slaves was tossing to the rowers their evening meal—biscuits soaked

in oil and vinegar. Plainly the galley was anchored for the night, half a mile from shore.

Demid had been studying it leisurely.

"How many fighters does that craft carry?" he asked Balaban.

"'Tis a one-bank galley, a courier ship, without cannon. Forty slaves at the oars, a score in the crew, wardens, helmsmen and officers—perchance thirty in yonder company on the poop."

"Come," said the Cossack, "here is metal for our welding."

He turned toward the fires over which the pots of gruel were heating, but the Levantine plucked Michael by the sleeve.

"A wager, O Frank. My sapphire girdle against the scroll you carry in your wallet—'tis worthless to you, now."

"Can you read the writing?"

Balaban shrugged.

"I have a mind to it. One cast of the dice——"

"For the bearer, the *seguro* is a death warrant."

Now the mind of the Levantine read into this response that Michael valued the paper and would not hazard it. So his desire for it grew the more. Time pressed and he spoke under his lip. "Hearken, O *Aga*—leader of warriors— You and I have our feet in the same path. If the Cossacks are cut up we must look to ourselves. I can serve you, and you me."

"How?"

"What will be, will be. A pity if this Falcon falls under the sword, for he would be worth a thousand gold pieces alive—and a prisoner."

"On which side are you, in this war?"

Balaban raised his eye to the evening sky and lifted both hands.

"Am I not with the Christians, O my *Aga?*" Adding under his breath—

"May Allah the All-Knowing cast me down, but I give them cause to remember me!"

Michael studied him a moment and suppressed a grin.

"Be it so. My safe conduct against your girdle upon one cast of the dice."

Gathering up the dice carelessly, he tossed them down on the earth.

"*Bi'llah!*" Balaban muttered, for the adventurer had made a good throw.

His eye dwelt watchfully on Michael, who, grave of face, turned to glance at the galley. And in that second the Levantine cupped the dice in his hand, rolling them off his fingers as if awkwardly as Michael looked down upon them.

"A main!" cried the Irishman. "The paper is yours."

Satisfying himself that no one was aware of the transfer, Balaban thrust it into his girdle and strode off, well-pleased with himself and utterly unthinking that the Christian had permitted himself to be cheated. Michael considered him philosophically.

"What will be, will be, quoth'a. Yon swashbuckler hath rarely the air of a Grand Turk."

From the beach the Cossacks were running up to where Demid stood in the center of the village street. The hamlet itself was half hidden from the galley and already mist veiled the outline of the beach.

"My children," said Demid, when the last man stood within hearing, "we have come far, and now our path lies upon the sea. Before now, I have not said what was in my mind. We are going against yonder galley with our sabers. What do you say?"

"Good, father," muttered Togrukh. "We will pound mightily with our blades."

"That is not all. It is not my plan to frolic on the black waters. What will it avail us to take the chaff that floats on the waters? Word came to me in Kudak that, over the Black Sea, is a treasure city of the Turks, where the caravans from Arabia and Persia unload. In command of this city is a pasha, to whose fingers stick the red gold and the gleaming jewels that pass through Aleppo. This pasha is Sidi Ahmad."

"True, *ataman*," observed Balaban readily. "My silver girdle against your scabbard that you do not come upon Sidi Ahmad unaware."

Demid looked at his men thoughtfully.

"It is far to Aleppo. We do not know what we will find on the way. For some of us there will be a grave dug; others will taste of the torture stake. God only knows who will see the Siech again, or when."

The warriors nodded, stroking their mustaches, and eyeing Demid expectantly. Not quite understanding his plan, they were assured that the young chief would lead them to the place where they might set hands on treasure.

Balaban's eye glittered mockingly. He knew more of Aleppo and the road thither than his companions.

"If any one of you," Demid glanced at Michael and Balaban, "has no heart for the stake, let him take his horse out of the line and fill his saddle-bags with fodder. No blame to him."

Togrukh ran his eye over his detachment menacingly, but the warriors did not draw back.

"Then," went on Demid, "from here, we are on the march. If one of you is found drunk—a pistol-ball in the forehead. If a brother turns aside to gather up silks or trinkets or silver, his saber will be broken."

"Father, we hear! Shall we go against the ship before dinner or after?"

"After."

Demid took Michael aside.

"It will not be like snaring birds—tackling the galley. You are not one of us and you need not go in the boats. Two men must guard the horses——"

"Not I, *ataman.*"

The adventurer smote his hip with relish of a sudden thought.

"With your leave—I will snare some birds. Aye, the nets are ready."

While the chief listened, he explained carefully what was in his mind. Demid considered a while, with deepening interest.

"But who would cast the nets?" he asked at length.

Near them, outlined against the sunset, the giant form of Ayub stood. The Cossack, with his companions, was praying before the evening meal, his arms raised, facing in turn to each quarter of the horizon.

"There is one who could do it." Michael pointed him out.

WHEN the Great Bear, glittering overhead, indicated midnight, the Cossacks embarked. All the clumsy arquebuses were left with the horse guard, and Demid gave command that no pistol was to be fired until they gained the galley's deck; he himself took one of the *caiques*, the long skiffs, that were to approach the stern—Togrukh the other. Ayub, with ten warriors guided the third skiff toward the bow of the Turkish ship and with him went Michael.

In the waist of the skiff the Tatar fishermen, brought for that purpose by the Cossacks, moved the oars slowly through the water; the warriors, with drawn sabers, knelt in the bow, their heads concealed by the fringe of rushes fastened to the skiff's side. Michael made himself comfortable on the great fishing-net at Ayub's knees.

The night was bright—too bright for concealment—yet, obscure against the loom of the shore, the skiffs covered two-thirds of the distance to the galley without being observed.

Michael made out the tall mast, with the clewed-up lateen sail, the hanging pennons and burgees; he could hear the low voices of men in the lookout over the beak of the galley, mingled with the tinkle of a guitar from the poop where colored lanterns gleamed. A figure passed slowly back and forth along the bridge above the slaves, snoring on their benches.

A faint breath of wind, and he caught the odor of the rowing-benches which is not easily forgotten—the stench of sweated rags, of foul water and human flesh. The skin on his back prickled over the healed scars that had been given him by a warden's whip. Another scent came to him, the incense and rose-perfume of the poop that served to keep the stink of the rowing-benches from the masters of the galley.

By its rig and the cut of the beak he was now satisfied that the galley was from Barbary—an Algerine, most likely, on business of the Sultan—a swift craft, adapted for fighting. This meant that a good watch would be kept, and that the two light cannon in the forepart would be shotted.

This fact he could not make known to Ayub. Besides, it was then too late to withdraw. A voice hailed them sharply—

"What is there?"

Ayub muttered under his breath, and a Tatar made answer as instructed.

"We have fish for the noble lords."

The sounds from the poop ceased, and a man in gilt mail and a green turban stood up by the lanterns.

"*Kubardar*—have care! We will make fishes of you, filth eaters. Be off!"

But the skiff rowed nearer, more swiftly now, and there was a moment's silence while the watchers on the galley puzzled over the screen of rushes. A lanthorn was thrust over the forward rail, hardly eight feet above the surface of the black water. By its gleam Michael made out the muzzles of two perriers peering over the beak, and Ayub thrust the tiller to one side, turning the skiff to avoid the ram.

A shout from the look-out, a pattering of feet, and the clash of cymbals, as the

Cossacks crouching in the skiff were seen. Pitch torches began to sizzle over their heads.

"Mud-fish!" bellowed Ayub, dropping the tiller and catching up one end of the long net. "Wriggle out of this if you can. *U-ha!*"

"*U-ha!*" roared the warriors, springing up. The giant Cossack was swinging a length of net over his head. Weighted as it was with stones in the corners, it gained momentum slowly, but soon whistled through the air like one of the lassos of the Cossacks. Michael stepped clear of the other end as Ayub grunted and released the net just when the skiff drifted abreast the low forecastle of the galley, a spear's stretch away.

The twisted hempen mesh spread out in the air and the stones thumped on the deck as arrows began to flash toward the skiff. Pulling on his end of the net, Ayub drew the boat against the galley's quarter.

Entangled in the mesh, several Moslems struggled to win clear of it. Taken completely by surprize, their efforts only served to draw the strands tighter. As many more—sailors roused from sleep—drew simitars and sprang to the rail barely in time to oppose the Cossacks who climbed up aided by the strands of the net, by the beak, and the muzzle of the cannon that gaped at them silently.

One pitched into the net on the deck, an arrow through his jaw, but the rest cut down the Moslems before they could flee to the runway leading aft. The sailors caught under the net were despatched at once.

Meanwhile torches flared up, and bedlam burst forth in the waist of the ship. The slaves, awakened by the fight, were howling, cursing and praying in a dozen tongues. Lacking time to chain their arms, the Moslem wardens who had sprung to the bridge were hewing down the bolder spirits who had stood up. Plying long blades, the guards thrust and cut down into the shadows until Ayub sighted them and leaped upon the runway his broadsword gripped in both hands.

"Death to the sheep-slayers!" he roared, striding forward.

The runway, serving as a platform for the overseers, was wide enough for only one man to wield a weapon, and the first Moslem who faced Ayub set his back to the mast around which the bridge ran. The big Cossack swept aside the warden's steel and hewed back. Biting into the man's ribs, the heavy blade turned down, ground through the spine and sank to the hip bone on the other side.

Michael, at Ayub's shoulder, saw the doomed Moslem actually fall apart, his body dropping over upon the slave's bench, his legs twisting on the runway. At once the rowers were on their feet, their hairy faces gleaming, their hands straining at the chains that bound their ankles to the deck.

Three of the guards now formed abreast on the runway; the two, in the rear thrust their long spears past the center man, who glared at Ayub from behind his round shield.

The prospect of having to deal with three weapons instead of one did not halt Ayub, whose blood was up. Luckily for him the Cossacks on the foredeck used their pistols and the leading Moslem stumbled forward to his knees. Then the broadsword flashed and Michael saw the two remaining guards knocked over the rail of the runway as if the mast had fallen upon them.

They fell into the upstretched hands of the slaves, and Michael was glad to look away, toward the poop where a hot fight was in progress.

Demid, in his shirt-sleeves, had climbed over the rail of the afterdeck followed by a dozen warriors. Long pistols flashed from behind him, and cleared a space for the Cossacks to set their feet. A score of white turbaned janizaries faced them, plying simitar and dagger, while nearly as many under the *reis* of the galley defended the other rail against Togrukh and his men.

As more of the Moslem swordsmen came up from the cabins, where they had been asleep, the captain of the galley drove back Togrukh, casting him bodily into the water.

"*Yah Allah!*" they cried, triumphantly.

"*U-ha!* Christ!" echoed Ayub's men, pushing forward along the bridge.

This shout drew the attention of the *reis*, who, experienced in hand-to-hand fighting aboard ship, determined to clear the runway. He feared the slaves who were striving desperately to win free of their bonds and take their share in the fray now that the slave guards had been slain.

For the moment the Moslems had the upper hand. Good swordsmen all, they were fired with the ardor of their race, and to Michael it seemed as if they were a picked lot, and the galley no ordinary merchant craft.

When a dozen of them swarmed down the steps to the runway after the *reis*, Ayub stepped forward to meet them. But he felt an elbow in his ribs, and looked down to see Michael slip past him. The cavalier took his stance in the center of the narrow bridge, and the light from the spluttering torches glittered on the slender rapier. Perforce the big Cossack hung back, for to press against Michael would be to throw him off balance, and already a youthful warrior was rushing upon the rapier point.

Gliding rather than running, the Turk struck down at the slender weapon of the cavalier. Then, leaping bodily through the air as a panther springs, he brought down his left arm that held a curved dagger.

Quickly as the Turk attacked, the wrist of the swordsman forestalled him. Michael's rapier flickered around the simitar and passed through the heart of the Turk, who fell heavily to the planks.

Drawing his blade clear at once, Michael faced the bearded captain who came on crouching, shield advanced before his throat, mail encasing his body.

Thus, he presented no opening for a thrust. His black eyes over the round, leather shield glittered. Twice he cut powerfully at Michael's head, and twice the curved blade slithered off the rapier that moved only in tiny circles before his eyes.

"Reload your hand-guns, dog brothers," snarled Ayub over his shoulder to his men who pressed close behind him.

Michael studied the eyes of his foeman, and when the *reis* lunged three inches of steel passed into his knotted forearm, and withdrew, all in the same instant. Pain maddened the Moslem who began to slash fiercely, yet as he did so, felt the burning dart of the rapier point into his biceps.

Foam flew out on his beard, and he lunged with all his remaining strength. In so doing he let the shield drop just a little, and, swifter than the eyes of the intent spectators could follow, the rapier flashed into the beard of the Moslem and its point came out at the nape of his neck.

He coughed once convulsively and straightened to the toes. Then Ayub thrust the cavalier aside and rushed with his mates upon the captain's followers. Long pistols barked in the Cossacks' hands, and smoke swirled around the twisting figures.

A shout of dismay went up from the poop at the fall of the *reis*, and Michael, satisfied with what he had accomplished, saw that more Cossacks had come up under Togrukh who dripped blood and water alike as he moved. All hope of victory now left the janizaries who fought stubbornly in knots and were cut down by the heavier weapons of the Cossacks.

To the astonishment of the Moslems, when a score of them were still on their feet, Demid held up his arm and offered quarter.

"*Mashallah!*" cried one, his lips snarling. "Are we to be thrown to the rowers?"

"On my head," Demid made answer in their tongue, "it shall not be."

First a few and then many, the simitars clattered to the deck and Togrukh gathered them up. Above decks, resistance on the galley was at an end.

TAKING with him one of the unwounded janizaries Demid made his way down the steps into the after-castle, the long, narrow cabin that perched on the upward slope of the galley's stern. Several Cossacks hastened after him, to ransack the castle.

A great lanthorn, gleaming with many colors, revealed a confusion of carpets and mattresses, tabourets that still bore little bowls of coffee, garments and the chests of the Moslem warriors. Incense was burning and its pungent scent mingled with the acrid odor of powder.

The cabin seemed deserted, and the Cossacks, listening, heard only the splash of bodies thrown over the galley's rail and the thumping of booted feet overhead.

What held their attention at once was the pair of glistening black forms erect against a heavy teak lattice at the upper end of the cabin. Two Ethiopians stood here, upon a kind of dais. They were naked to the waist and they held drawn simitars; only the sweat that shone on their skin and their rolling eyes marked them as living beings, so still did they stand.

"What men are these?" Demid asked the captive.

"Eunuchs of the mighty, the merciful Protector of the Faith. They are a guard set over the treasure."

"Bid them throw down their weapons."

"O my lord, a higher command has been laid upon them by one greater than I." The soldier lifted his hands indifferently. "Also, they are deaf mutes."

Impatiently Demid ordered his men to disarm the mutes without slaying them, and the Cossacks sprang forward obediently. The slaves struck out wildly, and defended themselves with fingers and teeth after they were thrown to the deck. It was more difficult to break down the wooden bars that had been built into place without any door as far as Demid could see. He tore down a damask hanging within the lattice, and stared in silence at the treasure of the galley.

At the end of the cabin and raised above it by several steps was a large recess made comfortable with silk rugs, draperies of cloth sewn with gold, and pillowed couches.

"Women!" Balaban's voice was exultant.

Straight as a spear, a young girl stood beside an older woman who crouched, wailing and tearing at her hair. One glance the serving maid cast at the Cossacks, and straightway ripped off her jade armlets, her rings and even the long earrings. These trinkets she pushed toward them, on the floor, and fell to beating her forehead against the rug.

The Cossacks glanced inquiringly at Demid who shook his head without speaking.

Balaban stepped forward and thrust his knee against the attendant, rolling her over on the floor; then, turning up her face with his foot, he pulled off her veil and stared at her, scowling.

"Wrinkled as a quince," he observed in disgust, "and boney as a camel, by the Unshriven One. A scavenger of —— would flee from her if she smiled."

And he stooped to pick up the ornaments, muttering at their poor quality as he put them into his pocket. His eyes gleamed as he contemplated the young girl.

"A veritable moon of delight," he leered. "Surely the angel Riwah hath opened the gates of paradise and let out this houri."

And he made a motion to pull aside the *yasmaq*, the veil which all Moslem women must wear before the eyes of men.

"It is death to touch me," the girl cried, in a clear, high voice.

Balaban, a little disconcerted, glanced at her robe of flowered silk, her tiny slippers, embroidered with diamonds, and the long sleeves that concealed her hands.

"On her girdle—the writing on her girdle!"

He pointed at several Turkish words sewn upon the length of green silk that wrapped the body of the girl under the breast.

"'*The treasure of the lord of lords.*' *Ohai*, my Falcon, that means the Sultan and this is one of his women."

Even Balaban hesitated to set a rude hand on one who had been taken into the household of Mustapha, knowing that to do so would be to place upon his own head a price so great that life would be sought of him in the uttermost corners of the earth.

"What is your name?" Demid asked the girl.

"*Lali el Niksar*—Lali, the Armenian."

"Are you a sultana?"

She shook her head, the dark eyes watchful and defiant.

"A slave?"

"*Taib*—true."

Hereupon the maid saw fit to voice the importance of her mistress, hoping to impress it upon the Cossacks. "*Yah khawand*—my lord, she is a pearl of the palace, a favorite singing girl. How many times has she been given a robe of honor! How often have noblemen offered a thousand *dinars* for her! She knows the rarest Persian verses, aye, the blandishments of the Greeks, and the dances of the Cairenes. The child can wag her tongue with priests, even as she can confound the wits of the young warriors——"

"Peace, or your tongue will wag no more. Is she a captive?"

The old woman hesitated for a bare instant.

"O captain of a host, it is not so with her. They call her the Armenian, but she was raised from childhood in the imperial *seraglio*. May I burn, but that is truth. Now she is sent as a gift to Sidi Ahmad, Pasha of Aleppo, as a token of the favor of the Sultan to that great lord."

"Was a writing sent with the girl?" asked Balaban, frowning.

"Beyond a doubt, the *aga* of the janizaries had it upon him. He was our leader."

Demid gave command to his followers to search for the body of the officer and retrieve all papers before it was thrown into the sea; also to ransack the quarters of the *reis*. The serving woman grew bolder because no harm had been done to her mistress, and plucked Demid's sleeve.

"O thou captain of men, take thought for the profit thou canst garner. Turn the ship back to Constantinople; ask what

ransom thou wilt of the Grand Signior, and it will be granted if the hand of an unbeliever is not laid upon the singing girl. Aye, even to two thousand pieces of gold, it will be granted."

The lidless eyes of Balaban blinked shrewdly, as he tried to gain a glimpse of the letter that one of the men brought to Demid presently. Two thousand pieces of gold would tempt most men.

"The price is not sufficient," responded the Cossack chief, who was scanning the parchment.

It was not, as he had hoped, a pass for the janizaries, nor did it contain directions as to the route to be taken to Aleppo. But it gave Demid food for thought, in that it contained a veiled reproach from Mustapha because Sidi Ahmad had not sent the revenues from the captured provinces of Armenians or the tax from the caravans for the last year.

Mustapha said that a general campaign was to be undertaken against the war-scarred nations of Christian Europe in the Spring—that he, Mustapha, had broken the power of the Cossacks, and concluded a secret treaty with the nobles of Poland by which the Poles were excused from paying tribute to Constantinople, so that the way into the cities and monasteries of Hungary and Russia was opened.

"Gold," muttered Demid angrily to himself. "When will gold buy peace? Nay, the point of the sword is surer."

The letter concluded with an order for Sidi Ahmad to set out from Aleppo over the mountain passes to the Black Sea, as soon as the snow melted, with horses and men and the revenues of the Sultan. As surety of the favor of Mustapha to the first of the pashas, the singing girl was sent.

"The Sidi must be a strong prince," Demid reflected, "for the Grand Signior uses soft words with him. Aye, and Aleppo is far from Constantinople. That is well, for us."

THE *kohl*-darkened eyes of the singing girl did not appear to look at Demid, but under the long lashes they studied covertly the face of the young chief. In it she wished to read her fate. And it piqued her that she could read little.

Demid had dismissed every one else from the women's cabin; he had stationed the two blacks on guard again at the broken lattice, and now stood looking out of the oval port, apparently listening to the sounds on the upper deck where the captives were being chained to the rowers' benches.

The girl, too, heard the uproar of the slaves who were being freed from their chains. Her eyes, over the silk veil, were stoic, although the flowered robe quivered where her heart beat thuddingly.

Suddenly the muscles of her slender arms tensed, and her eyes snapped angrily. Demid had reached out swiftly and grasped both her wrists under the wide sleeves. A moment she strained, gasping, and then, feeling the power of the man, ceased struggling. From the limp fingers of one hand he took a dagger that had been hidden by the sleeve.

"*Yah shatir*—captain of thieves! Prince of hyenas, father of treachery!" she cried. "Can a dog change his hide? *Eh, wah!* He can not. Nor can a son of ill-born robbers stay his fingers!"

Between those same muscular fingers Demid snapped off the blade of the poniard and tossed the steel out of the port, returning to Lali the hilt, set with sapphires and gold bands.

"Keep all your jewels, singing girl," he observed, "for the time will come when you will need them."

"And how, my ruffian?"

"To make you beautiful."

"Boar of the steppe, what know ye of beauty? I have heard of your people; they spend their days digging in the ground for roots, or feeling hens for eggs. Aye, Kazaks, vagabonds, eaters of filth—ye ride two on a horse, ye suck the juice of one weed and swallow the smoke of another!"

Her tongue was barbed with the caustic wit of the *seraglio* women, and yet Lali was not a woman in years. Robbed of her dagger, she resorted to her readiest weapon, but even this failed her for very rage when Demid ran his hand over her girdle and dress to satisfy himself that she had not a second weapon concealed about her.

"You have put your hand upon me, O *caphar*—O, unbeliever! For that they will draw you on the stake with horses. I have seen it."

"And what are you?"

The gray eyes of the Cossack gleamed from his dark face, and Lali caught her breath to study the splendid head of the warrior. He towered over her, unmoving,

and unwearied. She had felt the strength of his hands, and now she answered the challenge of the gaze that searched her thoughts.

"I am the daughter of a *cral*—a chief."

"Then you were not born in the *seraglio*, as your woman said."

Lali considered for a second or two, which was long for her.

"Nay, I was born in the mountains, among my father's people, the Armenians. He was killed in a raid, and the Turks carried me off with the other children. But what is that? I say to you that you are a fool, if you spare me, for you will be tortured when the soldiers take you."

A flash of memory, and she saw how to make the Cossack flinch.

"*Ohai*, my captain of rogues, I have seen your warriors in chains in the city of the Sultan, aye, and dying on the rowers' benches. Your chief I saw, when Mustapha paraded the captives before the palace. He was like the grandfather of the eagles and his hair was white."

"Rurik!" cried Demid.

"So they named the Kazak. They hold him and his comrades for ransom of which the Grand Signior has need—otherwise their Kazak heads would have been salted and set up outside the gates. The shoulders of Rurik were bent by shame and he walked slowly like an ailing ox."

So said Lali, fiercely, delighting in the shadow that passed over the brow of the young warrior.

"If you would not share his fate, free me and go back to your fishing-boats. There is time."

"Time," mused Demid. "Aye, but little for what is to be done."

"Yet enough, O youth," she added softly, "to serve the king of kings, whose memory is long—who can reward you with a province. A thousand *amirs* ride in his suite, and the Frankish kings bend low their heads to him. Only your *cral* stands apart from the court," she added, "chained."

Lali laughed under her breath, seeing Demid turn to a couch and sit down, holding his head in his hands. She was quite surprized when he remarked presently that she should fetch food and set it before him. Even her forehead flushed at the command.

"I, to serve a boar of the steppe! I, who go to the pasha of a kingdom? What words are these words?"

"A command, Lali."

Togrukh or Balaban could have told the girl that the Cossack had a habit of never repeating an order; nor, once given, did he change the order. Experience had taught them the value of obeying Demid at once, and discussing the wherefore later. But Lali had come from a narrow world where her sisters were mistresses of numberless slaves. Slaves themselves, they often ruled the Moslem men through beguilement and flattery.

In the world of this child, the person of Mustapha and all that belonged to him was sacred. She had her share of the instinctive wisdom of her race and sex where men were concerned, and had decided against flattering Demid. Moreover, she had the pride of her birth.

"I will not. You will be torn in pieces."

"First, Lali, bring that tabouret and set out whatsoever you have."

The girl grew quiet, staring round-eyed at the motionless Cossack.

"If I do not?"

Demid looked up.

"I will bind you, little song-bird, and put you through yonder port. Once the sea embraces you, there will be no more song."

He meant what he said, Lali decided at once. In her unfledged spirit there was no great fear of death. What was ordained would come to pass, and not even a favorite of the palace could outwit the Severer of Society, the Ender of Days. Even before she had been taught by the instructors of the *seraglio* to walk with the swaying step of a gazelle, or to sing, low-voiced, she had seen women led away to be strangled, and once a sultana had been poisoned at her side during a feast. But the sea!

Lali shivered, and glanced at the curtain behind which she knew the negroes were standing. Little use to call them, now, when the Cossack had his sword. She thrust forward the tabouret with a slippered foot.

She wondered if she was finding favor in the eyes of the chief. It was possible. So Lali changed visibly. She rolled up sleeves, disclosing slender arms bearing the finest of bracelets, and went briskly to work fetching sugared fruits and rice and saffron and bowls of preserves from the cabinet that served as a larder.

Demid eyed the array of dishes with disgust, and she made a sign ordering one of the negroes to go for wine.

"Bid the other," suggested the warrior, "draw back the curtain. Let him summon hither some of my men and also the galley slaves."

"Fool," she whispered, "would you have them set eyes on me?"

As Demid made no further remark she concluded reluctantly that he meant what he said.

In a moment there came trooping to the lattice bearded Cossacks, weapon in hand, and gaunt, shambling figures reeking of sweat and wine. They thrust aside the blacks and pressed close to the openings. As a swift current draws flotsam upon a stream, the singing girl drew their eyes.

"This captive," said Demid, putting his hand on the girl's arm, "is mine. If any of you venture to the lattice again, a ball in the forehead. Have you heard?"

"We hear, father!" cried the Cossacks, who stood erect, arms at their side.

As they were trooping away Ayub came swaggering up, his duties on the upper deck at an end. He sniffed at the negroes; then his glance wandered through the lattice and his jaw dropped when he beheld Demid at ease on the couch, emptying the goblet of wine.

"Oho!" he roared, thrusting his great head through the aperture, "Sultan Demid, it is! May the —— fly away with me, but I thought your sconce had been cracked by a simitar, so long were you below. Aye, that would have been better than this, for your wits would not be covered up by a petticoat."

A smile curved Demid's thin lips. Ayub had a deep conviction that all women were witches—the more beautiful, the more dangerous.

"You will be safe from my men who have seen that you serve me," he said gravely to the flushed girl. "Meanwhile, consider this, Lali. Our road leads to Aleppo, and thither we will take you. You have a mind to stratagems, so beat your wings against the cage, if you wish, but do not forget that you must please Sidi Ahmad, or the Sultan's gift would be vain."

Lali bowed, deeply puzzled.

"When will my lord visit his slave again?"

"When the slave summons the boar of the steppe."

The curtain fell behind him and though Lali ran to it and listened she could not make out what the Cossacks said to each other. She contemplated the untouched dainties, frowning. Then tripped to an ivory chest and drew out from a pile of garments a mirror of burnished bronze.

Glancing around to be sure that she was unobserved, she snatched the veil from her cheeks and stared at the image in the mirror—at the delicately moulded cheeks, the fair, white throat and the lips that had been termed rose-petals by her women. She pushed back the strands of dark hair, to see the better.

Lali had believed in her soul and her women had assured her that the first man to look upon her unveiled would become her slave. And the Cossack had not so much as touched the veil.

"HAVE you eaten opium? Has a vampire settled upon you and sucked your brain dry?"

Ayub walked around his comrade and contemplated him from all sides with the greatest amazement.

"Did I hear you say you would take that peacock to—Aleppo?"

"You heard."

Ayub's head had room within for only one idea at a time. Now he scratched his skull with stubby fingers, caked with dried blood.

"With the Don Cossacks? With me?"

"You will have her under your care, for she is valuable to me."

The big Cossack crossed himself and breathed heavily.

"I would rather shepherd yonder turtle-doves of the rovers' benches. Nay, *kunak*, in what way have I crossed you? Has the young witch begun to make play with you already—like a fish on a line? Hearken, Demid, I was with Rurik when he stormed a galleon of Constantinople in other days, and when he found a nest of these Turkish girls in the hold, he weighted them down with shot and dropped them over the side. That is the best way."

"Nay, *kunak*, she is our passport to Aleppo."

That night Ayub in common with the other Cossacks drank heavily, for Demid had given leave. But, though he sought enlightenment in wine, he did not grasp what Demid had in mind. How could a woman serve as a safe-conduct? His experience had been otherwise.

"It can not be," he remarked after long

brooding to Togrukh. "If she had been a horse, that would be well, because a horse can be managed even at sea, and, besides, is worth more than a woman. Even our *ataman* can not make any good come out of a woman on a journey."

The sergeant sighed and moistened his mustache in a nuggin of mead. He was a melancholy man, and he had troubles enough, at present.

"If the Father says she will be a passport, she will be."

"A passport to purgatory!" Ayub snorted. "Your horse has more intelligence than you, Togrukh, because he shies at a petticoat. I say the girl is a witch! If you say otherwise I will pound you."

Togrukh sighed again.

"Then, *ataman*, let us drink to the witch."

"Well, this is rare good mead: there is sense in you, sergeant, if a man digs enough to get at it. Let us drink to the witch."

V

The ways of the sea are blind ways; whosoever follows them knoweth not the end of the road.
The caravanserai of the sea is a place of sleep; whosoever sleepeth within it is not seen again of his fellows. ARAB PROVERB.

THE Cossacks had learned by long experience on the road to make the most of whatever came to hand. Being skilled carpenters, they were able to remove the central bridge and build horse-pens around the main mast, sufficient for two dozen ponies. This done, they set up larger water-butts at the break of the poop.

Embarking the horses was a problem. Ayub built with the timbers taken from the galley, a narrow jetty at the deepest point of the shore and the vessel was brought up to this during a calm.

The rowers' benches were rearranged—half a dozen before the horses, as many behind. Three men were put to an oar instead of two, the captured janizaries near the poop on which the Don Cossacks quartered themselves.

Balaban shook his head.

"If we run into a storm, the horses will break loose and bring terror among the rowers. The galley will steer badly, and how is the sail to be lowered?"

"That is your affair," pointed out Ayub. "What would we do without horses when we set foot in Asia?"

"They will die of thirst before then, because the water will suffice only for a week. Your chief has ordered me to strike out across the main sea instead of coasting. It is a hundred leagues to the southern shore—eight days sailing if the wind holds fair. But what if we have a *bonanza*, a dead calm? Take thought of this: the oars will not drive the galley against a head wind, nay, nor a cross wind."

Fortunately the galley was well stocked with foodstuffs, and in the sleeping compartment of the dead *reis* they found an astrolabe, and an old Venetian compass. No charts, however, were discovered and when they shipped the anchor and set out from the half-moon bay, they were forced to rely on Ayub's knowledge of the coast line, and Balaban's reckoning.

The surviving Christian captives—Greeks, Genoese, Spaniards, with a smattering of French and Dutch—pulled willingly, for Demid had promised that once the Asian shore was reached, the galley and all in it would belong to them. They preferred to take their chances in some trading port of the southern shore, rather than land on the bleak Tatar steppe off which the fight had taken place. Moreover their toil was lightened because now they rowed in shifts, and as they labored, their eyes dwelt gleefully on the naked backs of the janizaries once their masters, now chained to the benches.

In such fashion did *El Riman*, the swift galley, set out to sea.

"Faith," grinned Michael, casting his eye down the deck, " 'tis Jason and his Argonauts, come to life again."

Leaning his weight on one of the long steering-oars—he and Ostrog shared this duty with Ayub who alone of the Cossacks had voyaged on a galley—he bethought him of the saga of Jason and his men, the first of the adventurers of the sea.

Surely, the Argonauts had been the first to come into this sea, and they, too, had steered for Asia and the court of an unknown king.

"If we had a Medea aboard, now," Michael meditated, following his whim, "the company would be complete. Aye, we have no sorceress."

Now it happened then, the day being fair, and the sun warm, Lali in her cabin below was minded to song. The thin note of her guitar seemed to come from the

water itself, and the voice of the girl rose clearly to the listening men.

It was a love song of Persia, wild and plaintive. Hearing it, the man who had been sounding the drum to time the stroke of the oars, ceased his efforts, and the Cossacks who had been washing out their wounds with salt water, lifted their heads.

The rush of water and the creaking of the oars did not drown the voice of Lali. The song deepened, sounding the ring of weapons, the thudding of horses' hoofs, and mellowed to a note of grief, dwindling so that long after she had ceased the warriors strained their ears to catch her voice.

The eyes of the *ataman*, Demid, sweeping the stretch of gray water, were moody. He was thinking of the steppe, the homeland of the Cossacks, and of another voice. So Ileana, the granddaughter of Rurik had sung to him when he was weary.

Michael, who alone of the ship's company had known nothing of Lali, gripped his oar hard.

"Medea! Child of Ætes, and mistress of the black arts! By the blessed saints, what other woman aboard this vessel would have a song in her heart?"

The whim seized him again. Here were the Argonauts and he was one of them. They were in search of the Golden Fleece. He wondered what they would find.

"In the name of the Horned One!" The harsh voice of Balaban bellowed at him. "Would you drive us upon the rocks?"

Glancing over the rail, Michael thrust on the sweep, straightening the galley on its course. The drum resumed its beat, but the older Cossacks shook their heads sagely. This singing girl to them was an omen of evil fortune.

During the next week their uneasiness grew. While Balaban was clearly heading south by southeast—between the signs of Sirocco and Levant on the ancient compass—they raised land continually on the port bow. When they should have been, to the best of their knowledge, out in the open sea, they encountered numerous sails passing along the bare headlands of this strange coast.

The aspect of it was not familiar to Ayub, but Balaban, after questioning some of the Genoese, announced that they were passing along the peninsular of the Krim Tatars.* Several of the passing vessels were flying the Turkish colors, but Demid kept his distance from them, and no effort was made to speak the galley. He made several attempts to find water along the coast, and was at last successful.

This replenished the water-butts, and Balaban assured them that only some seventy leagues remained to be covered, across the main sea. Ostrog pointed to the sunset that evening—a red glow, centered in drifting cloud banks.

"A wind on the morrow," he said to Balaban.

"Aye, wind."

"Surely we must put in to shore and drop anchor."

"Nay, the Falcon will not." Balaban shrugged.

"A falcon is at home on the land; he is not a gull. Bah!"

Oaths flowed from the thick lips of the seaman.

"Aye, pray if you will. It is the hour of the *namaz gar*, the evening prayer."

Balaban pointed to the rows of Moslem warriors who were kneeling, facing the East, and going through the motions of washing.

"The wench brings us ill fortune."

"What will be, will be. My luck still holds."

The Levantine gave the order to pull away from the lee shore. Two men were sent up the mast to the spar, and the great triangular sail loosed its folds for the first time. But Balaban did not yet make fast the lower corner, to which the sheet was attached.

CLOUDS rose higher against the stars. The glow of a lanthorn fell on the bronze disc of the compass, over which, in the shadows, Demid stood. The surface of the waters was dull and oily, and the galley rolled, so that the Cossacks could not sleep.

Still the oars creaked, as exhausted men pulled in time to the monotone of the drum. It was hard work, for the swells were running strong, but the slaves knew the danger of a lee shore. From time to time a cold breath of air came from the northwest.

"The sea is restless," muttered the Cossacks.

"Soon it will begin to prance and then you will know sorrow," spoke up Ayub from the darkness.

Suddenly the sail snapped, as if a giant

* The Crimea, on modern maps.

had cracked invisible fingers. The stays hummed, and the galley leaned to port, ceasing its rolling. Balaban had made the sheet fast.

"Lash the oars with the blades aft!" he shouted.

The slaves, expecting this command, hastened to obey, and shouted with relief when the two banks of oars were secured and their labor at an end.

The *bonanza* had ceased and the wind had come. The galley, deep of keel and slender of beam, rushed ahead through the darkness like a fish-hawk, skimming the surface of the waters, ready to rise into the air.

By the next evening the wind had risen to a gale. Balaban, glancing to the north with the last of the light, ordered the oars inboard and lashed to the rail. White gleamed on the crest of the swells, and a roaring was in the air. Foam flecked the faces of the men and spray, dashed up by the prow, drenched the chilled bodies of the rowers, stretched on their benches.

"It is a *maestro* wind," explained Ostrog wisely. "For two days it will lash us. Slay the horses while there is time."

But the Cossacks would not do that. The ponies staggered against the dip of the vessel and jerked at their halters. One screamed, and another, plunging, broke its halter. The men nearest the frantic animals began to barricade themselves behind piled-up benches.

Balaban and Ayub took one of the steering sweeps, Ostrog and Michael held to the other. A dull creaking began in the depth of the galley, and before the third watch the sail ripped loose from its sheet. Snapping and lurching, it whipped forward from the slanting spar. But the braces held.

The mishap to the sail brought about what the seamen on *El Riman* had been dreading—the stampede of the ponies. Rearing on each other, and crashing against the rail, half of them were loose in a moment. Demid, running to the break in the poop saw what had happened and went down with Togrukh and a half-dozen Cossacks. They climbed over the barricade of benches, and worked in among the horses, half swept from their feet when a roller came over the windward rail.

Several of the beasts were lost in this wave, borne over the side. Cursing and straining every muscle, the Cossacks worked to get the rest in hand. To add to the confusion on the galley many of the long oars had broken from their lashings. These had to be secured, and the heads of the ponies bound in sacks. With their heads muffled the beasts quieted somewhat, but the gray light of morning revealed the Cossacks still among them, silent and blue with cold.

They were driving ahead in high seas, the tatters of the sail on the spar serving to keep the prow of the galley steady. Rain, in gusts, lashed them, and the whine of the wind sank to a moan.

From the depth of the galley came again the song of Lali, barely to be heard, fitful as the cry of a *ghil* of the waste. The Cossacks crossed themselves. One of their mates had been washed from the waist and another lay crippled among the horses.

LATE the next afternoon they sighted a Moslem war-galley. Only a mild swell was running, and for some time they had been drawing in to a new shore.

An irregular coast, with jutting headlands and dense forests first appeared and, later, the white walls of houses and the cupolas and minarets of mosques. They had not observed the town until they rounded a long point and found themselves almost in the mouth of a narrow harbor where a score of carracks and galleys had assembled to ride out the storm.

Balaban perhaps, could have told them what they would come upon, but he kept his own counsel, and Demid, after a glance into the bay, gave order to row on, without haste. He made out the ramparts of a fort, and noticed that one of the galleys had its anchor up.

They had no choice but to try to steal past, trusting that no one would think it worth while to send after them.

Sight of a half-dismantled Algerine galley passing the port without putting in proved to be too much for the curiosity of the commander of the war-vessel, and the Cossacks saw its prow appear around the headland before they were two miles distant. Presently smoke puffed from a port in the foredeck of the pursuer, and Ayub swore under his breath.

"Yonder serpent of the seas carries half a dozen barkers, and four-score warriors. Demid, *kunak*, we must put spurs to *El Riman*, and outstrip the dogs, or they will pound us with iron balls and sprinkle us with arrows."

"Aye," assented Balaban, "nor can you close with them, for the war-galley is handier and by the way the oars dip, the rowers are fresh."

Demid nodded, observing everything with care, as was his way when matters went ill. His own rowers were tired after the two days' battle with the storm; water had seeped into the hull of *El Riman* and the galley moved sluggishly. The Moslem craft was covering two spans to their one, and in an hour they would be overtaken. Never before now had he been called upon to defend a galley and his mind misgave him, as to what should be done.

"What is our best course?" he asked Balaban, who stood with Ostrog at the steering oars.

"Row on, lash the slaves and gain what time we may. The sun is near to setting, and when darkness falls we may run the galley ashore and shift, each for himself, in the forest."

"Better," growled Ayub, who liked this counsel little, "to turn in our tracks and fall on them with our sabers."

"They are no lack-wits, to be taken so," the Levantine pointed out. "Rather, they will comb us over with cannon and bows, and your men will die like sheep."

There was truth in this, and Ayub glanced helplessly at Demid, muttering that their plight was the work of the witch. Had she not summoned up the storm with her song, and had not the tempest made *El Riman* like a foundered horse, fit only to drop into a ditch and be plucked by kites?

Demid's keen eyes studied the polished poop of the pursuer, outlined clearly in the setting sun, and the steady beat of the long oars. Now he could hear the measured throbbing of the drum on the Moslem ship —could make out the lateen sail clewed up skilfully. Every warrior except the helmsman and the *reis* was stretched prone on the deck, to offer less resistance to the air.

"Aye," Balaban noticed his gaze, " 'tis a corsair from Barbary, on cruise in the Black Sea to collect wealth for the Sultan, doubtless. Those —— know the art of racing a galley. Better for you, if it had been a Turk."

The commander of the corsair was still in doubt as to *El Riman*, which flew a Moslem pennant; but the fact that she avoided him made him suspicious; in a few moments he would be able to see the Cossacks, and then all doubt would vanish. The distance between the two galleys had been cut in half.

"Lash the slaves!" Balaban whispered to Demid, who gave the order to Togrukh.

The sergeant had picked up a *nagaika*, a Cossack whip, and was running to the break in the poop when a shout from Ayub arrested him.

Simultaneously, Balaban and Ostrog had let fall the steering-sweeps, and had sprung to the rail at the stern. Leaping far out, they disappeared into the foaming wake, while the galley, without a hand at the helm, lurched in its course.

"*Akh!*"

The sergeant, in whose care the prisoners had been, ran to the rail, plucking out the long pistols from his belt and staring down at the swirling water. When the heads of the swimmers came to view, they were a cable's length away.

Togrukh steadied his hand and fired at the broad skull of Ostrog, the seaman. No splash in the water followed the report, but Ostrog flinched and sank from sight quietly. Togrukh took the second pistol in his right hand and sighted with care.

The weapon flashed, and this time the bullet struck spray a foot from Balaban's ear. Togrukh, peering through the smoke, muttered to himself, and came to attention before Demid. The renegades had been in his charge, and, except during the storm, he had not left them unguarded a moment. True, he had an excellent excuse, but among the Cossacks excuses were not in favor.

Demid saw Balaban raise an arm and wave it, in taunt, and then strike out toward the onrushing corsair. The Levantine had taken a desperate chance, that the Moslems would pause to pick him up, for the shore was beyond reach at this point. He was able, however to make some signal that caught the attention of the *reis*, for the oars were lifted, the galley slowed as its momentum ceased, and a rope was cast to the swimmer who hauled himself to the rail.

Turning, Demid was aware of the sergeant, standing at attention, and realized that Togrukh considering himself at fault, expected a blow from his saber or denunciation before the warriors which to a man of Togrukh's long service was as bad.

"You had an order, *essaul*. Go forward with the whip."

"Then there is no blame, father?"

"No blame to you."

Togrukh's eyes brightened and he cracked his whip, glancing around to make certain that the Cossacks had heard. Meanwhile the galley gained speed again, for Ayub and Michael had caught up the steering-sweeps. There was now no seaman on *El Riman*, and a distant shout from the corsair announced that Balaban had lost no time in making known the identity of the fleeing galley.

He had chosen well the moment to make his hazard, for he would be honored for boldness in escaping from the Nazarenes, as well as for the news he brought. Ayub glared back resentfully.

"That fellow has turned his coat so often, —— alone knows which is the lining and which the color. May he burn!"

"We have not done with him," responded Demid. "A barb is in him that will goad him against us."

"See the Turk reins in, and slows from a gallop to a trot. He seeks to tire out our men at the oars, knowing that we can not hide our trail from him."

So said Ayub, and in fact the pursuer settled down to a long stroke that kept him about a mile distant. Aware by now of the exact strength of the men he was following and their lack of seamanship, he could afford to choose his own time to attack. *El Riman* had drawn closer inshore, but the coast was rocky and bare of cover. They searched it with their eyes, rounding a cliff-like headland, but saw no place for a landing.

It was Michael who first noticed that around the headland the shore fell away and the mouth of a river showed. With a cry he swung hard upon his sweep, motioning for Ayub to do the same, and the prow of *El Riman* entered the shadows between the hills.

The river was not wide, but it was deep and tortuous, between shelving clay banks. No landing place offered, and Demid gave order to cast over anything that would lighten the galley—water-butts, anchor, and such of the stores as were on deck. Some of the warriors walked among the benches thrusting biscuits soaked in wine into the mouths of the rowers, while others saddled the ponies—to the amazement of the slaves—and filled the saddle-bags hastily.

"The saints grant us a place to land," muttered Ayub, "before the Turk comes up."

But by the time they had passed through the range of hills on the coast and were approaching open country darkness had fallen, and the pursuers were within gun-shot. *El Riman* limped along while Ayub and Michael strained their sight ahead, making out the channel by the break in the trees that lined each bank.

So the race had been lost, and they were forced to listen to the mocking shouts of the pursuers who were clearly to be seen under lighted flares and torches, set in place on the corsair's rail.

"They are taking their daggers in their teeth, father," Togrukh pointed out. "They are ready to attack."

Demid's indecision vanished at the prospect of action. Making sure that his leaders understood what they were to do, he explained that *El Riman* must be run to shore —beached, so that one side should be toward the river. Meanwhile Ayub was to issue to the Chrisitan captives the weapons taken from the janizaries, and the starboard rail was to be cut away in one place, to allow the ponies to jump from the deck and make their way ashore. The defense of the poop he entrusted to Togrukh with a dozen of the Cossacks who had arquebuses and pistols.

"Can you beach the galley?" he asked the cavalier quietly.

"I think so, if you will take the other sweep and do as I do."

Michael leaned forward to peer into the dark lane of the river. Behind them, the corsair was coming up quickly, her beak cutting into the wake of their galley—so swiftly that already the glare of the torches shone on the water. This light enabled Michael to make out a short sand-bar and the glint of rushes along the shore to the right. Where rushes grew he knew the bank must be muddy and low.

"Weigh starboard oars!" he barked, and thrust his back against the steering oar. Demid followed his example.

"Pull, all!" he commanded, moving his sweep over sharply.

El Riman glided in, diagonally, toward the rushes, and Michael, glancing over his shoulder, saw the corsair duplicate the maneuver.

"Weigh, all!"

Once more he leaned his weight on the steering-oar, bringing the drifting galley parallel to the shore, and braced himself for the shock. The beak of *El Riman* plowed

into the mud and sand of the bar, at the same time that the keel grated over rocks and came to rest in the ooze. Slowly the deck inclined a few degrees toward the land, so that the starboard waist was nearly level with the water.

Red flashes rent the darkness and thudding reports deafened the Cossacks who were scrambling to their feet. The corsair had raked the stranded galley with its cannon, and now checked its course. Its ram ripped slanting along the ribs of the galley, splintering the long oars, and bringing the forecastle abreast the poop of the galley.

"*Yah Allah!*" howled a hundred throats.

The Cossacks answered with a discharge from their firearms, and Demid sprang to the rail as lithe figures swarmed upon it. Togrukh and his men stood shoulder to shoulder with him and sabers rang against simitars.

"Slash, slash!" roared the Cossacks.

Arrows whizzed down from the higher after-castle of the corsair, and Ayub, running aft, saw several of his comrades fall. The big warrior was in a seething rage because the Christian slaves would not touch the weapons he offered them. Aware that the Cossacks were bound to lose in the fight, they sat passively on the rowing benches, choosing for the most part to go back to their lot as slaves rather than be cut down by the Moslems. Some jumped into the water and waded ashore with the ponies who stampeded as soon as the firing began.

Barely half a dozen followed Ayub to the poop. He was met by Demid who had cleared a space on the after deck for the moment, aided by the cavalier. The eyes of the young *ataman* were dark with excitement, and his lips snarled. The hot blood raced in his veins, and he longed to cast himself back into the thick of his foes and strike with the sword that served him so well, until he could strike no more.

Upon him, however, rested the fate of his men, and a quick glance fore and aft told him the fight was lost, on the galley. The janizaries were shouting and breaking from their bonds in the waist, and behind them scores of bowmen were wading through the rushes from the corsair, to cut them off from the shore.

"To the bank with the horses!" he ordered Ayub. "Hold the shore."

With that he sprang down into the after cabin and darted to the lattice, sweeping aside the quivering negroes. Here was gloom, relieved only by a flickering lamp—gloom where smoke swirled around the form of Lali, erect beside the couch, and the wailing maid. Since the capture of the galley these two had not met, and now the fine eyes of the girl stared at him tauntingly.

"Come out!" Demid cried.

"Nay, O captain of thieves, shall I flee when dogs are whipped? Said I not the hand of the Sultan would cast you down?"

Demid stepped through the opening in the lattice and grasped at her waist. Lali evaded him deftly, and laughed as he stumbled over the rug. Then his fingers caught her shoulder and she squirmed, beating at his throat and trying to set her teeth in his forearm.

Her veil was torn away and for the first time the young chief looked into the flushed face. The scent of musk was in his nostrils and the breath of the girl warmed his lips. Tears of sheer rage made her dark eyes brilliant as they flew to his, questioningly.

With the flat of his simitar Demid struck Lali in the side, driving the breath from her lungs. An instant she quivered, and her eyes widened, then half closed as he caught her behind the knees with his left arm, throwing her over his shoulder. He could feel the throbbing of her heart against his throat.

Turning back through the lattice, he raced for the steps, expecting to have to hew his way through the throng of Turks upon the poop. But here Togrukh still stood with one of the warriors, back to back. And Michael, who had seen Demid go down into the cabin, was poised over the stairhead, his rapier making play against three simitars, his lean face expressionless as a mask.

Signing to him to follow, Demid made his way down to the waist of the galley, struck the hilt of his sword into the eyes of a foe who was climbing over the wale, and leaped bodily down into the darkness and rushes. He went into water up to his waist, but kept his footing with an effort. Michael splashed beside him.

Arrows whistled overhead, and once Michael went headlong into the shallows, just as the giant form of Ayub loomed up before them.

"This way. We have the horses."

He pulled the slender Michael bodily

after him, and covered Demid with his long broadsword. On firm ground, under a network of trees a group of Cossacks were rounding up a dozen ponies.

Demid mounted the first that was offered him, and placed Lali before him.

"To saddles!" he commanded, and as he spoke, beheld Togrukh and the old Cossack in the center of a ring of Moslem swordsmen on the slanting deck of the galley.

The sergeant caught the voice of his leader over the uproar, and lifted his left hand.

"Farewell, father. Tell—of Togrukh——"

Demid started in his saddle and tightened his rein. Then, realising that he could not leave his men, who were now about him to go to the sergeant's aid, he whirled his horse and trotted back into the shadows. Once he glanced back, at a shout from the Moslems and saw Togrukh's head, the eyes still quivering, stuck upon a spear.

"He had an order to hold the after-deck!"

The thought tortured him, and he drove his spurs into the beast under him in silent fury. The Cossacks, accustomed to finding their way about in darkness seemed to cluster about him by instinct. One spurred forward to seek out an opening in the trees. The rest muttered satisfaction. They were ashore, at a heavy cost, but upon the earth again, with horses under them.

NINE times in ten, a company of soldiers thoroughly thrashed and dispersed in strange country would have scattered helplessly through the forest. The cry, "Each man for himself," would have meant death for all at the hands of the Moslems.

In fact the warriors from the corsair had kindled torches and were searching the wood in bands, expecting to hunt down the fugitives.

On every hand, however, as the Turks advanced, the cries of beasts arose in the brush. The yelp of a jackal answered the whining snarl of a panther, and, more distant than the rest, the howling of a wolf rose steadily. Here and there the thickets ahead of the searchers were shaken by the rush of a four-footed animal.

But no forest animals were there. The men from the Don were at home in timber, and this was their fashion of calling to each other. Single warriors joined together, evaded the torches and made their way to the howling of the wolf, where Demid had assembled the nucleus of their band.

By the time the animal calls had ceased, some score of men, half of them mounted, had gathered about their *ataman* in a clearing by a ruined farm, and Demid knew that no more were alive, to come.

He satisfied himself that Lali was living and not much hurt, before he handed over the girl to Michael, whom he had kept at his stirrup during the flight from the beach. Then he called the roll softly and discovered that two of the riders were Christian slaves from the galley—an Armenian and a Syrian who had found themselves horseflesh as promptly and skilfully as a Jew pouched ducats. These he ordered to give their mounts to Cossacks.

Without troubling to learn if his men still had their weapons—a Cossack of the Don is separated from the skin of his body as easily as from his saber—Demid asked a question quietly.

"Have we sword strokes for the —— who took Togrukh's head?"

"Aye, father," spoke up the oldest of the Cossacks—he who wore two shirts and was called Broad Breeches. "We have sword strokes and we are ready. Once our mothers bore us," he added reflectively, and a trifle indistinctly, for his upper lip and some teeth had been shot away by an arrow.

The dark line of the forest was kindled by oncoming torches, and the main party of the Moslems who had followed the trail of the horses came into sight, loud-voiced and flushed with slaying. They had put to death the unfortunate galley slaves who had decided to await their coming, and were reinforced by the liberated janizaries.

The bowmen, eyes on the trail they were following, ran forward into the clearing, and halted at the sound of hoofs thudding toward them in the dark. They snatched up their bows and loosed arrows hastily, without seeing clearly what was coming upon them.

Rising in their stirrups and striking on each side, the Cossacks broke through the archers and wheeled about among the scattered groups. In the saddle and on open ground they were different men from the dogged crew that had been beaten from the galley, and so the Turks found them.

Wherever a knot of swordsmen still stood together, Ayub galloped, his broadsword whistling over his head, and the massive blade cut into flesh and bone as a sycthe

passes through the stalks of wheat. Half seen in the elusive torchlight, the tall riders assumed gigantic proportions in the eyes of the corsair's warriors who began to flee into the brush, leaving a score of bodies in the clearing.

More torches were coming up, as the bodyguard of the Moslems with their leaders, deployed from the trees. Demid lifted his head and howled, and the Don men wheeled their horses and trotted back in a dozen different directions, so that the Turks could not be sure where they were headed.

Demid, the last to go, circled his horse within arrow shot of the torches, looking for Balaban. He saw the Levantine, but in the center of a mass of swordsmen. He saw, too, something that gave him food for thought.

The Levantine was armed with a silver-edged shield, and a fine simitar and he was directing the array of the Moslems, although officers of the corsair were at hand. It was more than strange that he should have been put in command, almost at once, of men who had not seen him until he was hauled out of the water like a fish.

"Wing me that hawk!" Balaban shouted to his archers, recognizing Demid.

A dozen shafts whistled in the air, and as the first one reached him the young Cossack was seen to cast up his arms and fall back from his saddle. His body slumped over the pony's rump, until it was held up only by his feet, caught in the stirrups and his knee crooked over the saddle.

His scalp-lock and sword-arm dragged on the ground, as the horse swept past the torches.

"Shoot, O dullards—O dolts fathered by fools! See you not the man has tricked you?" cried Balaban in wrath as the archers held their shafts to watch the Cossack drop to earth.

He gritted his teeth as Demid, out of range, twisted up his body and caught the saddle-horn.

"Allah grant thee to live until I come up with thee again.

A voice answered, out of the darkness, laughingly—

"And thee, also."

The sharp about-face of the Cossacks slowed up pursuit that night, and when the next day the Turks moved forward from the farm they followed the trail of the horses to a small village. Here was found no living thing, for the inhabitants had fled to the hills and the Cossacks had made off with a dozen head of horse.

By now mounted men were arriving from the nearest castles of the Turks, and couriers were sent to the outlying *begs* and chieftains with word to gather swordsmen and take up the trail of the infidels.

Before nightfall the pursuit was on in earnest, and the pursuers were confident because on the sky-line, ahead of the Cossacks, uprose the lofty snow slopes of *Charkahna*, the Mountains of the Wolves, known today as a spur of the Caucasus.

While the levies of the neighboring *begs* were coming up, separate riders—Turkomans, on picked horses—were sent ahead to gain touch with the fleeing Cossacks. These reported that the unbelievers were changing horses at each village, and were stocking up with provisions as well as grain and dried camel's flesh for the horses when they should reach the snow line.

Once they passed into the higher altitudes, the fertile hamlets of the fruit and vine growers and rug makers of the shore of the Black Sea were left behind, and the Cossacks headed in a direct line for the nearest break in the barren peaks that rose, like a bulwark of the giants, in their path.

So the outriders reported and there was satisfaction in the camp of the Turks when word came that the Cossacks had entered this gorge. Because, unwittingly, the fugitives had chosen a blind valley. Here the Mountains of the Wolves could be entered, but the gorge ended in an impasse.

Into this cañon the Turks pressed, sounding their *nakars*—cymbals—and kettle-drums—because some of the Turkoman tribesmen believed that the Mountains of the Wolves were inhabited by *ghils*. By *ghils* and by other spirits of waste places.

They remembered these things all the more because snow flurries smote them, and bitter winds buffeted them. They pounded the cymbals and smote the drums, until the wind died down and the flurries ceased and they came to the sheer walls of rock on two sides and a frozen waterfall at the end of the ravine. Whereat they yelled aloud in amazement.

The Cossacks were not in the gorge. Several lame ponies huddled together, but not a human being was in the trap. Upon the ground was only the white sheet of new-fallen snow.

The trap had been sprung and the victims had escaped.

It was vain to look for tracks, and the ponies were palpably left behind as useless. The Turks eyed the wall of rock on three sides with misgivings; no ponies could climb the cliff here, and yet the Cossacks were gone.

"*Dil i yarana*—be of stout hearts, comrades," they said, one to another. "The *ghils* have taken the infidels and without doubt we shall behold them of nights. Aye, fire will rush out of their nostrils, as they spur their ponies through the air while the spirits whip them on."

With this wonder to relate in the villages they hastened back rather more quickly than they came. Only Balaban smiled his wry smile—

"The time is not yet."

VI

IBNOL HAMMAMGI

"AS I LIVE, *kunak*, you have brewed a fine gruel for our eating," Ayub throttled his bull's voice to a rumbling whisper, so that the Cossacks would not hear his complaint.

Some hours before the Turks, Demid and his men had reached the end of the gorge, and now sat their steaming ponies gazing blankly at the ice-coated waterfall, the black sides of the impasse, and the fringe of green firs on the heights above—which might have been the forest of Ardennes so little chance had they of scaling the sides of the gorge.

"Did I not warn you to sprinkle the witch with holy water and drop her into the sea?" Ayub went on, full of his grievance. "You did not, and what happened? First the storm happened and then the Turkish galley, and then Togrukh and his mates performed a deed. Nay, God deliver us from such deeds! Their Cossack heads were stuck on pikes. That is what they did."

Demid, hands clasped on his saddle-peak, surveyed his company. Fifteen of the Don Cossacks had come through, and now were waiting patiently for him to lead them out of this scrape as he had done out of many another in the past. Sir Michael of Rohan strolled along the nearest rock wall, stretching his legs stiffened by the long rides.

"There she sits, the witch!" rumbled Ayub. "Brewing—for our quaffing. For the last two days you followed the way pointed out by the Armenian youth, her countryman, who swore he knew the snow road through these mountains. Where are we now? Save that we are south of the shore of the Black Sea some forty *versts*, no one knows. We can not go on, and we can not go back. The Turks have already entered the foothills below, and that hairless jackal, our guide, slipped out of sight last night like a weasel out of a chicken-roost. May the dogs bite him! He knew we were going to halter ourselves in this stall."

Demid pulled at his mustache reflectively. He had no reason to distrust the Armenian boy, who seemed anxious enough to lead them to safety, and whose life was as much at stake as theirs.

"Have you an idea?" he responded curtly, for the fresh misfortune was serious.

"Aye, so," answered Ayub promptly. "The witch can work a spell for us as well as against. She can find a way out of this if she will. When I deal with her she will bethink her of a way."

Taking Demid's silence for assent, the big Cossack swaggered off to Lali who was cracking walnuts on the pommel of her saddle and chewing with relish. From somewhere she had conjured up another veil, and Demid had seen to it that she had a long sable cloak to wrap around her light attire. Seated disconsolately by her horse were the two blacks who, impelled by a dread mightier than the fear of dismemberment and eternal damnation, had struggled along at the side of the woman given to them to guard.

Standing beside Lali, the head of the warrior was on a level with her own. He crossed himself by way of precaution, and swelled out his chest, letting out a roar of mingled *lingua franca* and bad Turkish.

"Daughter of unmentionable evil! Washwoman of the Styx! Wench of the Grand Turk, which is to say the foster-child of Beelzebub himself—you pulled wool over my brother's eyes, you took him in nicely, you did!"

The wide eyes of the girl met his squarely, and a tingle ran through the Cossack's veins.

"Demid struck me," she responded.

"Well, that is nothing. He will make saddles out of your skin and whips out of your hair if you don't bestir yourself and

find a way for us to escape from this spot."

The dark eyes dwelt on Ayub fixedly and he was aware of a prickling of his own skin that was not altogether uncomfortable.

"Send the captain to me," she offered at length.

"Impossible. The *ataman* is in the —— of a fix and has no time for a woman."

"Is he a great *khan* in your country?"

"Aye, he is first among the Cossacks, who are all nobles."

Lali glanced at the young chief, who had just set the men to work preparing food for the noon meal. His long, black coat was more than a little tattered and the white ermine *kalpack* was torn by thorns. But Demid sat erect in the saddle, his colonel's baton held on his hip. Lali sighed under her breath—

"He has few followers."

"Not so, prattle tongue. He has as many as the pasha of Aleppo, whom we will hang on his own gate-post. But these are enough for our needs—Demid's and mine."

"I could tell you much of Sidi Ahmad, pasha of Aleppo."

"Ha!"

"You, who are a man of understanding, know the value of information to a leader. Is the little Frank also a *khan*, that Demid should talk to him always, and cherish him?"

"*Ser Mikhail*—aye, he is adrift from his people. I know not if he is truly a chief but he wields a sword——"

"I saw you hew down the Moslems in the fight by the farm. You tossed them about like chaff. Have you forgotten how I bound up your cuts that night?"

Ayub rubbed his chin and looked everywhere but into the dark eyes that warmed his heart like a nuggin of mead on a cold night.

"Child of evil," he responded sternly, "do not think to trick me. Is there a way out of this lobster-pot?"

Lali tossed away the last nutshell, humming lightly to herself. Her dark head bent nearer the Cossack, who no longer took his eyes from her.

"What is evil?" she asked. "And what are we but leaves, on the highway of fate? We know not the road before us. *Ai-a*, I have known sorrow."

She rocked in her saddle and her warm fingers touched Ayub's scarred fist. A shrewder man than the Cossack would have thought Lali's lament sincere. And it was.

"Father of battles, I would aid the young hero, but he struck me. I know a way by which he can escape; will you help me to find it?"

"Oho!"

Ayub twirled his mustache, bending his shaggy head closer.

"Now," he thought, "we are getting the milk out of this cow."

"How?" he asked.

"Build a fire, a great fire. Place upon it branches from yonder cedars, dampened with snow."

"Then what?"

"Do that first, then come to me. I am going to summon up my people for your aid."

Ayub stared and went away. With some pains, he kindled the blaze as Lali directed, and heaped on the branches. To the Cossacks who asked what he did, he explained that the witch had repented, when he—Ayub—had argued with her, and was about to work black magic for their release.

She wanted to speak to the *ataman*, but he—Ayub—had denied her that. The *ataman* had warm blood in his veins, and the girl was a very peacock for beauty; she would make eyes at him and melt the iron out of his heart. Perhaps she would make him kiss her and after that the young hero would be as wax in her hands.

So said Ayub, not knowing that Lali had beguiled and tricked him completely in a scant moment.

"But, *kunak*," observed the oldest of the Cossacks, scratching his shaven skull. "Our father Demid has steel in his heart. He whacked the fair young witch with his saber. That is the way to handle a sorceress."

From her pony Lali contemplated the shaggy men with amusement, guessing the subject of their talk.

"O headman," she called softly to Ayub, "I will bring your Demid to sue for speech with me before the fire sinks to embers."

"What says the witch?" asked the veteran mistrustfully.

Ayub explained, not altogether at ease. It seemed to him that Lali was too confident. Still, magic was needed if they were to escape from the gorge. Demid had no plan as yet; in fact the chieftain was staring up through the smoke at the narrow walls of their prison, as if contemplating birds in

the air. His quiet heartened the Cossacks, who went on munching their barley cakes and dried meat.

"Were you not afraid to let the witch girl touch you?" they asked Ayub.

They believed implicitly in ghosts of unburied warriors and spirits of the waste places—vampires who sucked a man's blood, hob-gobs who turned horses into toads, and will-o'-the-wisps who could lead even the hardiest astray of a dark night. They were sure that Lali had laid a spell on Ayub.

"Oh, that is a small thing with me," Ayub swaggered a bit. "When I was born my mother put me in a snowdrift to season me, and though the dogs howled all night and the vampires were thick as locusts in harvest time, I came out without a chill. Once, when I was old enough to ride herd, a witch came into our village in the likeness of a panther to draw some blood from the horses. But I said a prayer and took her by the tail——"

"Only think!"

The Cossacks shook their heads in amazement at such daring.

"—and twisted it. Straightway, she turned herself into an eagle, and tried to fly off, but I had hold of her tail-feathers——"

"Such a man as he was!"

The warriors lifted their hands helplessly.

"—so that she was fain to change herself to a maiden, like a flower for beauty. *Ekh*, I danced with her a day and she could do no more with me than this peacock—in the name of the Unhallowed One, what are these?"

The Cossacks glanced up in alarm, seeing Ayub's jaw drop.

"To your sabers!" shouted Demid angrily.

Down the cliff wall on either hand were scrambling human beings who resembled limbs wrapped in coarse wool, long hair hanging about their eyes they glared at the warriors. Some perched on narrow ledges, poising heavy stones; others leveled small bows. Out of the mist and the drifting smoke, shaggy heads came into view silently. Only goats, the warriors thought, could have made their way down the cliffs.

The Cossacks formed in a ring around Demid and the horses. As they did so, a score or more of the gnomes emerged from a cleft in the rock near the fire. They were squat and stoop-shouldered, and they glided forward moving softly in the loose snow. Among the rearmost, Demid made out the brown face of the Armenian lad who had undertaken to be his guide, and who had set him on the path to this gorge.

It was Michael of Rohan, ever careless of events, who laughed.

"Burn me, but here are the wolves of the mountains. And yet—they have come a little early to pick our bones."

"IBNOL HAMMAMGI, Ibnol Hammamgi!"

The girl, sitting apart from the ring of warriors, called clearly, and at once a shape disengaged itself from the other shapes. This was a bent figure wrapped in a shawl over which thrust out a head bald as a vulture's. A single glittering eye fixed upon the singing girl; the other eyeball had vanished from its socket. Ibnol Hammamgi shambled forward and, with disconcerting suddenness, twitched the veil from Lali's face.

"Eh—eh," he whined, "verily you are the child of Macari, the *oral* of our folk. It is eight Winters since Macari, your father, was burned alive by our Turkish overlords because the tithes of our clan were in arrears to them. Yet I know your face."

"Ibnol Hammamgi, the day the Moslems raided our village, they took me with other slaves as payment of the tithes——"

"Aye, that also is known to me. Our folk numbered you among the dead, daughter of Macari. Until yesterday when the youth, your messenger, came to me at Sivas with his tale."

"You saw my smoke?"

"I am not blind. We hastened. A goatherd ran up to us with word that many Turks have entered the lower defiles."

Being headman of the clan, Ibnol Hammamgi would not condescend to question a young woman, but his eye turned appraisingly on the Cossacks.

"They are Franks from across the sea. Their sword edges are sharper than their wits, or they would not be upon the road to Aleppo. I want you to lead them from this place, to our folk. Can you save the horses?"

Ibnol Hammamgi hunched himself closer in his shawl and shook his great head gently from side to side.

"The horses, aye. The men are another matter——"

"You will profit much."

"How?"

The two spoke together, low-voiced, and in the end the Armenian gave his assent, surlily enough. A bridle chain clinked behind them, and they beheld Demid within arms' reach. Lali did not draw back.

"*Ohai,*" she greeted him," the slave has summoned the boar of the steppe, and, lo, he comes."

"Are these your people?"

"Aye, so. Are you ready to bend the head and sheath the sword, to win safety for your—" Lali, glancing at the young warrior, altered her word—"your men?"

"My men do not bend the head, nor do I."

Slender hands uprose to her brow in a mock salaam.

"Great mighty captain of beggars and king of nowhere—have you wit enough to understand this. The low-born lad who led you here did so at my behest. This is a trap, sometimes used by my folk, but a trap for pursuers, not pursued. There is a way out, unknown to the Turks, who will think that demons have made off with you, if you come with us——"

"Enough," whined the *cral*, who had been sniffing the air like a dog. "Snow is coming down from the crests, and we must be upon the paths."

He glanced at the gold and silver trappings of the Cossack's saddle, and at the packs of the warriors, who had managed to carry off more than a little spoil from the Moslem towns.

"These Franks have chosen good ponies from below. That is well. Will they keep truce with us?"

Lali shrugged and turned to Demid.

"Will you share our bread and salt, and sit down with the maid you struck?"

Demid considered, for he did not pledge his word lightly, and the girl puzzled him.

"Lead us out of this gorge and we will share bread and salt with you."

She tossed her head, disappointed perhaps because he showed no anxiety to go with her. Ibnol Hammamgi lifted his voice in a shout and his followers began to scramble down from their vantage points. Signing to Demid to accompany him, he trotted away toward the cliff. Passing along it for some distance, he turned in among a nest of boulders. Here the path bent sharply and led into what seemed to be the black mouth of a cave.

Entering, the Cossacks dismounted. Torches were kindled and they pressed forward on foot, drawing the horses after them. The tunnel ended in a narrow cleft in the mountain where the gray light hardly penetrated. Evidently, the Cossacks noticed, the mountaineers were following the course of a stream, now dry, that had once forced its way into the gorge they had left.

Gradually the chasm widened into a wooded ravine, up which they climbed to come out on the ice-coated slopes of the mountains above the timber-line. The Armenians pushed on with a shambling trot that made the heavier Cossacks pant to keep up. A word of warning was passed down the line as they threaded along a narrow ridge where stags' antlers, stuck into the stones at intervals, marked the trail. In single file they felt their way where snowdrifts on either hand made the road impassable for any who did not know the marks. And, as they mounted again, on firmer ground, snow began to fall.

They had left the Black Sea and its guardians behind.

VII

LALI MAKES A PROMISE

AN IDEA once planted in Ayub's mind stuck as a burr sticks to lamb's wool. He was sure that the young witch had suffered a change of heart since her talk with him. Had not the Cossacks been well received by the mountain folk, and given shelter in a large hut that was more than half a cave—so steep was the side of the valley on which the hamlet perched?

Had not these goat-like people brought to them a goodly pot of mutton and rice, and bottles of really excellent red wine? And straw to sleep on? True, the Cossacks had taken much of this to rub down the ponies, and bed the tired beasts beside the fire within the earth hut. They had done this before eating themselves, and refused to give over the horses to the care of the village folk, for Demid had promised a vivid unpleasantness to the warrior who lost a horse.

Demid himself had gone off at sundown to the cabin of Ibnol Hammamgi, leaving the detachment in the hands of Ayub and Michael. They had slept all through the day, having come in the night before on the heels of the storm, and, being rested and fed, Ayub was moved to give tongue to the idea that possessed him.

"It would be a great miracle, *Mikhail*, lad, if the singing girl mends her ways and uses her arts to aid true men. Aye, a mighty miracle. Yet she touched me—all the *kunaks* saw her touch me—and here I am with a whole hide and a full belly."

Now, being quick of wit and having the gift of tongue, Michael of Rohan understood a little of the simple speech of the Cossacks, especially the military commands.

"When you sleep at an inn, keep one eye open for the innkeeper," he responded, in his own language.

"Eh?"

Ayub bent his head down, for the cavalier's hat came only to his shoulder. He had grown attached to the youngster, who always listened to his remarks at times when Demid, who used few words, was uncommunicative.

"Why here she comes, the dove!"

Lali in fact was passing the wide mouth of that hut where they leaned at ease, but it was a changed Lali. Her veil and cloth-of-silver had disappeared and her face was pallid under a high lace head-dress. A tight-fitting bodice sewn with silver coins and a voluminous over-skirt of black velvet failed to hide the girl's natural grace. She saw the two men and made a quick sign for them to follow her.

Ayub coughed and glanced covertly at Michael, who was fastening his collar and adjusting his sword-sling at a more becoming angle.

"It is said among my people," the Cossack ruminated, "that a Syrian can cheat two Jews, and an Armenian can lift the shirt from a Syrian—but still she looks like a dove."

The two followed Lali through a dog infested alley, past a donkey-pen and up winding steps where the hovels of the tribesmen could be touched by the hand on either side. Up more steps where children ran out to stare at the girl and to run from the warriors. Sivas was a nest of refuge for the harassed Armenians, hidden in the higher gorges near the caravan tracks. Michael wondered how human beings could exist there in such squalor, not knowing that the clay and the earth of the huts and the grime and the grease of the children all served to insure them gainst the visits of Turkish collectors and janizaries.

Above and beyond Sivas towered the mighty crests of the Caucasus, bathed in the purple and scarlet of sunset—as forbidding and awe-inspiring that day as when the priests of Armenia had walked openly in the footsteps of the Christian saints, who for a brief generation had been the monarchs of men and the counselors of kings.

"Now what is this?" Ayub clutched his arm.

Lali had slowed her steps and turned into a shallow ravine up which ran a broad flight of marble flags, broken and chipped by age and frost. Once she cast back at them a glance mocking and searching, then she fell to working at something in her hand, and when she pressed forward again into the shadows she carried a lighted candle.

They were aware of muffled voices close at hand and a glow from some hidden source. Lali rounded another corner in the rocks, and they halted in their tracks.

Before them uprose the portico of a chapel, but such a one as Michael had never seen before. Columns of blue marble supported it, and within a hundred candles glimmered upon glazed tiles, and images wrought in gold. Lali bowed her head and stepped into the throng of people that stood facing the altar. Every one held a taper, except the watchers in the portico who stared out into the shadows to give word of the coming of intruders.

Ayub, however, thrust past the guards and fixed his eyes on the black figure at the altar—an aged man with a white beard falling down the wide collar that covered his shoulders, who leaned upon the arms of two acolytes as if wearied by the weight of the white stole and black robe.

The patriarch was intoning a chant, in a high, clear voice, while the people sang responses. Ayub listened with open mouth.

"Eh—eh," he whispered, "here is a *batko*, a holy father, like ours who was cut up by the Moslems. I will rouse up our lads; they will want to set eyes on the *batko*."

With that he hastened off, leaving Michael in the shadow of a pillar. Unobserved, the cavalier watched Lali. When the prayers were ended the girl pressed forward, and there was a stir among the Armenians, when she knelt before the patriarch. The aged man asked a brief question, and cast the smoke of incense upon her. Out of the white wraiths of vapor the delicate face of the girl appeared, and

Michael saw her lips quiver as the priest touched her forehead and shoulder.

With a sudden motion she pressed to her cheek the edge of his robe and then drew back to her place. The heads of the Armenians nodded over their tapers understandingly.

When the singing began again, it was reinforced by the deep voices of the Cossacks, who crowded in eagerly from the portico. Michael now caught the words, which were indeed old and familiar—

"*Kyrie elieson.*"

It seemed to him that Lali was taking the sacrament, and that in some way she was bidding farewell to the people of Sivas.

He was puzzled by this, for Lali's nature appeared many sided, and he managed to ask Ayub about it as they made their way back through the snow. A cold wind swept the heights about them, and overhead the stars gleamed like jewels in imperial purple.

"Why," the big Cossack explained, "the girl was incensed and took a blessing from the patriarch, because she is going to her fate. That is, to Aleppo. Aleppo, they say, is —— and there the friend has his court. It was well we met with such a fine *batko*—he is the patriarch of Armenia come up from Antioch, in the Holy Land."

The Cossacks were indeed in vast good humor and the visit to the church seemed to remove all suspicion of them from the minds of the folk. Michael, too, felt at ease and ready for the next turn of affairs. The splendid edifice struck him as something of a marvel, and he did not know that he had been within a chapel built by a Roman emperor, Theodosius, in bygone days.

But he felt a stirring of the pulse, an intimacy with ancient and mighty things. He stood on the threshold of an older world and perhaps within his memory was awakened the pageant of ancestors of his line who had stood upon this ground when the hosts of the crusaders moved about the Holy Land.

Even Ayub was somewhat reflective.

"Well, I did not know that the maiden had changed so much, from a few words of mine. Still, I argued with her amain, and she listened."

At the entrance to the hut, one of the younger warriors took Michael's hand with a smile—

"Eh, will you frolic with us this night, Frank?"

"Why this night?"

The Cossack stared, and laughed artlessly as a child:

"Eh, the day after, the *ataman*, Demid, leads us forth to a long road. It is our custom to frolic before the road."

So Michael went about with them, and heard the note of fiddles and harps, drank of the red wine, and gazed at the whirling throngs of the young girls who danced before the warriors, encouraged by the shouts of the Cossacks—he shared the bread dipped in wine, and studied the lined faces from which care had fallen away for a few hours.

But most of all he watched the girl Lali, hearing for the first time her voice freed from all restraint, hearkening to the song that had come from her lips on the galley, beholding the grace of her light figure in the dance. And as he watched he frowned a little, repeating under his breath Ayub's words—

"She goes with us to Aleppo."

WHEN Demid entered the dwelling of Ibnol Hammamgi he bore with him two heavy sacks that clanked as he set them down near the tiled stove. A dozen pairs of eyes flew instantly to the sacks and lingered desirefully. They were hard, bleared eyes, those of the headmen of the tribe of Sivas—aye, sharp and penetrating withal. They pierced inside the heavy leather sacks and a dozen minds, shrewd as foxes, probed at the value of the things that clanked.

Beards wagged upon the breasts of ancient *kaftans*, shiny with grease, and the eyes, by a common impulse, travelled to the face of the young Cossack.

It was an open, weather-beaten face, that of Demid. The corded muscles of the bare throat and the slow-moving hands were evidence of lean strength not at first noticeable in that slender figure.

The headmen were satisfied. With half a glance they could pick out a man whose thoughts did not dwell on money values. It was well, they thought, that the stranger was such, because they meant to have some gain out of the windfall. Ibnol Hammamgi, their *cral*, had saved the thick necks of the Cossacks, and something was owing to the tribe for that—if not gifts, then some horses stolen, a few weapons pilfered by boys—a purse slit here and there by the young women——

Methodically Demid emptied out the contents of the sacks. Gold armlets, a silver head-band for a horse studded with sapphires, bits of ambergris, poniards from India with ivory hilts, odds and ends of coral. He had gathered together the pickings of the warriors on their ride up from the coast—some hasty plundering, done at his command.

Now, to give the headmen time to weigh the value that was scattered on the rug by their knees, he paused to light his pipe. This served, too, to stifle the smells of the hut, for overhead on the rafters were drying woolen pantaloons, and salted fish, and the stove hinted at goose feathers and bones in the fire—distasteful to the Don Cossack, who had no liking for the odors of a house, especially a dirty one.

But long before he had replaced the booty in the bags, a dozen agile brains had guessed the value of his takings to a copper drachma in the markets of Trebizond or Sinope.

"I leave these sacks in your keeping," he said to Ibnol Hammamgi, in the Turkish that the Armenians understood, "until we ride back from our raid. If we are successful all this shall be yours. If we fail we will take them again, having need of them."

"Whither will the noble lord raid?"

"To the castle of Sidi Ahmad, in Aleppo."

"Impossible!"

The headmen drew back into their fur-lined *caftans* like birds ruffling their plumage at a sudden alarm.

"That is madness!"

"How, madness?" Demid pushed the sacks away from him. "Is not Rurik, our *cral*, captive at the Imperial City, with many Cossack knights? Does not the sultan demand ten thousand ducats for his ransom alone? Well then, we must lay our hands on a treasure and surely there is a treasure at Aleppo."

The elders all began to talk at once, lifting their hands, and raising their voices, one above the other until Ibnol Hammamgi shrieked louder than the rest and shrieked for silence.

"What do you want of us?" he demanded, and now the headmen were quiet, seeking to weigh Demid as they had his booty. But this they found more difficult.

"A guide—horses—information."

"How many horses?"

"Two tens. But they must be good ones, Kabarda breed, or Kabulis."

"Not to be thought of! The horses would be lost to us, because you will never come back."

"Some of us will come back, Ibnol Hammamgi, and you will do well to aid us because one of your blood rides with us."

"To Aleppo?"

The bald head of the chief shook with a dry chuckle.

"We do not visit the stronghold of Sidi Ahmad, the Turk. Once I visited Aleppo, and they took a toll from me—thus."

He shut his good eye and opened the red socket of his blind side.

"Lali, daughter of Macari, goes with us."

"*Ekh!* Does a clipped hawk fly back to the hunter? The daughter of Macari is not one in heart with the Moslems; in her veins is the blood of her people. Does the noble lord think that now, when she is restored to us, she will be off at once to that demon's place, Aleppo?"

The noble lord looked at Ibnol Hammamgi thoughtfully. To tell the truth he had not reflected much upon Lali. The singing girl, that evening, had assured him that she would journey with the Cossacks to the castle of Sidi Ahmad, and Demid had found it a fruitless task to try to reason out why a woman—Lali especially—did things.

"Perhaps the distinguished captain," went on Ibnol Hammamgi, "does not know that Lali *el Niksar* is the child of a line of kings. Like a wild goose she is not to be tamed; her forefather was Kagig the First, who was monarch of a thousand spears when Greater Armenia was free, when the Frankish crusaders passed under our mountains and our chivalry fought at their side, and the ravines ran blood in rivers. *Christos vokros!* That was a day of days."

A gleam came into his sunken eye and his fingers clawed restlessly at his wisp of a beard.

"Blood will flow again before our horses turn their heads, O *cral*. Bid the girl stand before you, and you shall hear the promise she made."

Ibnol Hammamgi muttered over his shoulder and a tousled lad upheaved from a nest of sheep-skins, to run out of the hut in quest of Lali.

Meanwhile the fire had departed the pallid face of the chief and the habitual mask of caution descended upon it. It would not do at all, he reflected, for the Cossacks to make trouble for the tribe of Sivas.

"It is quite clear to me," he said, "that the noble sir does not know Sidi Ahmad at all. Except only the Sultan Mustapha, himself—may the dogs litter on his grave—the pasha of Aleppo is the greatest of Moslems. He has a heavy hand and a quick wit, and his treasury is full as a squirrel's nest in autumn."

Here Ibnol Hammamgi sighed, thinking of the vast wealth of the pasha.

"He has bled our people white, and he has taken a third from all the caravans that must cross his province; he took prisoner some of the finest amirs of Persia and no one can count the ransom he had of them. Besides that, he is overlord of Jerusalem, and has raised the admission fee to the Holy Sepulcher to four zecchins a pilgrim, not to speak of the entrance toll to the city for a Christian, of another six, and the certificate of visitation. Besides that, he has farmed out to the Arab chiefs the privilege of plundering the Frank pilgrims, at three thousand sultanons a year——"

"Dog of the ——!" Demid growled. "Why do not the Franks make their pistols talk to these usurers?"

Ibnol Hammamgi shrugged philosophically.

"Eh, the Franks are pilgrims, not warriors. A pilgrim pays money to keep his hide whole, a soldier is paid to have his cut up. Verily, Sidi Ahmad is the father of stratagems."

Suddenly the Cossack's white teeth flashed in a smile.

"A trafficker such as this pasha can not be a man of battle."

"Then the handsome captain does not know the repute of Sidi Ahmad. It is said that he was whelped during a sea-fight, on a galley. They call him a sword-slayer, another Rustam——"

"Good! Then he will be worth cutting down."

The old Armenians glanced at each other and threw up their arms, thinking that Demid had been drinking, which was not the case.

"The noble lord jests," remarked Ibnol Hammamgi sourly. "The pasha is the worst of all foes because he is *ghazi*—a conqueror of Christians, who has sworn on oath to keep his hand raised against them. Moreover, as I said, he is a very fox. Before he was appointed to the *pashalik* by his master the Grand Signior, he roamed the seas and the land like a tempest, bringing wo upon the enemies of the Moslems. But the minute he stepped inside the gates of Aleppo he shut himself up in his palace. The palace is shut up inside a wall, and the wall rests on a hill in the city. In the palace is a tower called the Wolf's Ear."

Demid nodded, listening attentively.

"Within the Wolf's Ear, Sidi Ahmad holds his *divan*—his judgment seat. There he receives his officers. About the tower is a garden, and there he takes his relaxation. He is gathering together a veritable thundercloud of men."

"And yet he sits in the tower."

"Always. It is said in the bazaars that in the Wolf's Ear is the treasury of the province. But, because he distrusts all men, the pasha allows few besides himself to dwell in the palace; moreover—" Ibnol Hammamgi lowered his voice from habitual caution—"some say that no one is allowed sight of the face of Sidi Ahmad."

Demid merely puffed at his pipe, assuming lack of interest, knowing that this was the quickest way to draw forth truth.

"Since he came to Aleppo, the pasha has given his judgments and tortured his prisoners at night, and the lights in the tower are kept away from him. Why is that? There is something hidden here. At times is heard the voice of another man behind the pasha and always this voice laughs.

It was the way of the Grand Signior to send officers to his governors who picked quarrels with the pashas or hired others to do so, and—when an official was dead, the sultan by virtue of the Moslem law became master of his possessions. In such fashion the treasure of the two predecessors of Sidi Ahmad had fallen to Constantinople. But the present pasha had guarded himself effectively until now, when his power was such that Mustapha did not dare do away with him. Moreover, Sidi Ahmad had been a favorite at court, and was *ghazi*.

This was late January and in some four months the passes of the Caucasus would be clear of snow. Then the forces of Aleppo would move to join Mustapha, and the united strength of the Turks and Tatars would go against Christian Europe. This meant the Cossacks would be the first to face invasion.

"It is strange," Demid said slowly. "A

fanatic, a warrior—and now a miser in his own prison. Is Sidi Ahmad tall and powerful of build?"

Ibnol Hammamgi shook his head.

"Nay, slight as a bird, and quick as a fox. How will you attempt to raid such a place?"

"By a trick."

"Ah!" The Armenian was stirred to interest. "By what trick?"

"I will walk through the gates, and they will all open to me."

"Riddles! By what key will you open the gates?"

"There is the key."

Demid nodded toward the door of the hut and the elders started, beholding Lali leaning against the doorpost. No one except Demid had heard her enter.

"*Ai-al*" Ibnol Hammamgi glared. "Daughter of Macari, will you ride to that place of all abomination with this Frank?"

"Aye, so."

A tumult of protest and reproof arose, heads wagged, and sleeves were rolled up that lean brown arms might gesture the better; foam started on the bearded lips of the headmen. They agreed that Lali had eaten shame by dwelling in the palaces of the Imperial City. By leaving her people for the *seraglio* of Sidi Ahmad, she would make that shame memorable, they cried.

"I have been incensed and blessed by the patriarch, O fathers," she cried at them. "I am ready for what is unseen and unguessed."

"But to go to the man who cut open your father, like a fish!"

The white face of the girl stood out, a cameo against the shadows of the hut, and seeing that their words were unheeded, the Armenians ceased their outcry. Lali, being the child of a chieftain, and her parents dead, was free to follow what path she would. She even smiled, for Demid glanced at her with frank approval.

The young warrior could deal with the shrewd brains of the Armenians, perhaps because his life had been spent until now in the wilderness where his friends and enemies were beasts, the man from the Don could see through the schemes of men; because of nights passed in riding herd and sitting by the lair of a stag, he had learned how to rely upon instincts that warned of danger.

But he could not judge what was in the soul of Lali, nor did any instinct warn him against the danger that dwelt in the passion of the girl for him.

On the next day Michael of Rohan vanished from Sivas as if the caves in the hillside had swallowed him up. He left not a trace, and Ibnol Hammamgi was as astonished as the Cossacks.

But Lali had never been merrier than on that eve of her setting out for Aleppo.

VIII

Where his grave is dug there shall a man die, and not otherwise.

He who hath a small soul walks with a short step, searching with his eyes for that which may not be seen, but the warrior who is great of heart strides free, knowing that Providence is greater than he.

ARAB PROVERB.

IN THE guard rooms of the musketeers of Paris many times had Sir Michael of Rohan wagered what he had in the world at *ecarte* or dice. It was his habit to accept the quips of fortune smilingly. The world was full of quips and he asked no more than to have a hand in the jest that was going the rounds. He had one peculiarity in play; whenever the women of the court or the nobles' halls took seat at his table, Sir Michael was wont to rise and lay down his hand or pocket his stake, making the excuse with perfect good humor that the ladies dazzled his poor wits.

The truth of it was that the fairer sex had no little skill at cheating, and it was not the part of a cavalier to call attention to peccadillos of this nature. Michael preferred to sit and watch, taking much amusement therefrom.

It was a fair bright morning, and the cavalier had been in good spirits as he watched the last of the sunrise from the edge of a cliff that formed an impregnable barrier between the tribe of Sivas and an invader. He had not heard Lali approach until she stood behind him, but upon perceiving the dark-haired girl, he had made a courteous bow, sweeping his plumed hat upon the very surface of the snow.

She stepped to the edge of the rock and looked down, the wind whipping her cloak about her limbs, and her long tresses unruly.

"From this rock, O Frank," she observed, "we cast down those who have offended. Many stout Turks who sought to climb to our nest have been tumbled back into purgatory from here."

"Ah!"

Michael offered his arm, and she took it, though sure of foot as a mountain goat. An imp of mischief danced in her dark eyes.

"Why does the young warrior always seek you?" She questioned gravely. "He never came for me but once and then he struck me."

From beneath lashes her eyes searched his face, and Michael did not answer because just then his ear caught the rasping of gravel displaced behind him. Lali's lips hardened.

"You are always with him, and your words have turned him against me," she accused hotly.

"I? Not so!" Michael glanced at her, puzzled, and, as he did so, the light was shut out. A heavy bear-skin fell upon his head, thrown from behind.

A man standing with his toes over a sheer fall of some thousand feet does not move haphazard. Michael reached swiftly enough for his sword, but before his fingers touched the hilt he heard the steel blade slither out. Lali had drawn it from the leather sheath.

He threw himself back, groping at the thick folds of the skin, and stumbled over his scabbard. A fiery wave passed up and down his spine as his feet slipped in the loose stones. Then powerful hands caught his wrists and ankles, and a rope was passed around his neck, binding the bear-skin upon his head.

The assailants lifted him, and bound his hands behind his back, passing the ends of the rope through his belt in front. Steel pricked his shoulder, and he heard Lali's contented laugh.

"Farewell, O my companion of the road. You go the way of an offender, but down the cliff path, so do not think to run away."

The rope attached to his belt tugged him to one side; another cord, tied to his bound wrists, swung him into the path—as his groping feet assured him. Muffled as he was, Michael did not think of shouting for aid, judging that if he did he would be thrust over the rock. Men's voices reached him and feet crunched before and behind. The bear-skin, as the sun grew stronger, nearly smothered him, while he felt his way down the path.

It was noon by the sun when the skin was pulled from his head. Michael was standing in the valley under Sivas, looking up at the tiny spots that were the huts against the glitter of the snow. Around him were the bare stalks of a vineyard, and within it he saw three Armenians taking money from a pock-marked merchant who kept glancing at him, doling out a silver coin after each glance, more slowly, until he stopped and the four fell to railing, until the Armenians finally left the merchant.

As they passed Michael—one was the boy who had served as guide from the Black Sea—he called out—

"The Cossacks will give more if you take me back."

But the boy turned his head away. Michael's lips stiffened.

"Where will they take me?"

One of the Sivas men looked over his shoulder.

"Bagdad—I don't know."

Michael opened his lips to call again, then squared his shoulders and turned to the two Turkomans who were leaning on their spears and looking at the line of laden mules standing near the vineyard—the caravan of the merchant who had bought Michael.

They untied his wrists, led him to a mule and when he was on the animal's back, bound his ankles together under its belly. A word of command was passed down the line of the caravan, saddles creaked, dogs barked, and voices rose in vituperation without which nothing is ever done in that bedlam of the world—Asia Minor.

Michael took off his hat and bowed to the distant height.

"I wish you well of the silver, Mistress Lali," he cried in English. "'Twas a slender price for such a man as I—who wished you well. If God sends we meet again I shall weigh you with more care."

He struck the mule with the flat of his leather scabbard and moved on with the caravan, the guards finding amusement in this antic of the Frank. It occurred to him that Demid had been wise to keep him with the Cossacks.

A WEEK later they threaded through the last mud of the foothills and dropped down below the snow line, having passed under the ruins of Zeitoon once the stronghold of the Armenians, now razed on its crags by order of Sidi Ahmad. Some of the merchants of the caravan drew off here, to take the highway to Damascus, but Michael's owner remained

with various rug sellers and other slave traders, on the southern trail.

Being merchants who disliked hardships, they camped that night on the near shore of a swift, blue river that Michael fancied to be the Chan or Jihan, once crossed by Xenophon and the Greeks. Being swollen by the melting snows its crossing was no easy feat, and the next morning the Turkomans were forced to strip, to carry over the goods on their heads, while the slaves were set to work to build rafts.

Michael setting about his share of the task philosophically, the first to note a band of cloaked horsemen spurring up over the sands. The merchants shouted for the guards, but those who were in the river made haste to complete the crossing, and the few remaining, after a glance at the drawn simitars of the Arab marauders, cast away their spears and sat down to watch events.

So did the slaves. Several of the owners of the caravan offered fight, probably hoping to make better terms by a show of resistance. The raiders made no bones about riding them down, and Michael noticed that they cut the throat of the merchant who had bought him.

In a few minutes the slaves who had been about to cross the Jihan were lined up and divided among the chiefs of the pillagers, together with the bales of cotton and furs. Camels were then brought up by grinning boys who signed for the prisoners to mount and accompany their new masters. A couple of the Turkomans were included by way of good measure, and Michael suspected that those who were left behind took advantage of the happening to plunder the remaining merchants.

So began a strange chapter in the long wanderings of the Irishman, who, in the eyes of his captors, the Arabs, was no longer a living spirit, but a thing of flesh and muscles, to be sold for the best price it would bring.

He noticed that the Arabs headed southwest, along the river and crossed lower down that same day, moving out before dawn toward a rocky range of hills where only one pass was visible. After laboring through the mud of this ravine, they made camp in a ruined *khan*—a traveler's shelter in a plain green and pleasant with olive trees and pomegranates.

Here again, the company divided after lengthy discussion, and an old Arab who looked what he was—a monarch of horse thieves—signed for Michael to come with him and a stripling who bristled with weapons as he tried to strut like the warriors.

This was different from the mule caravan. On a swift-gaited camel Michael sped along a beaten track with the desert riders, who circled the villages and headed toward a nest of minarets on the skyline.

Studying their destination as it drew nearer, Michael made out the white sides of a castle rising on a height—the green of gardens showing over the walls and a lofty tower over the gardens. Perhaps because the ground outside had been cleared of all brush and huts. he had never beheld walls so massive as those which hemmed in the city of minarets and domes—a city gleaming white and yellow and purple under the utter blue of the sky.

One of the thieves let fall a word that roused his curiosity at once—

"Haleb."

Now Michael was almost sure that this was Aleppo, and the thought that he had come before the Cossacks to their destination made him smile.

Michael reasoned that the Cossacks would delay only a short while to search for him; learning nothing of his seizure, they would press on, playing as they were for a great stake. They might come into sight of the city about this time, and he cherished this flicker of hope.

But, passing through the heavily guarded gate—*Bab el Nasr*, Gate of Victory it was called—on the north side of the town, and threading into the crowded passages between the sheer walls of mosques and the dwellings of the nobles, he mentally increased the odds against Demid.

Aleppo was full of Moslem soldiery.

Moreover it was full of mosques, which meant throngs of armed worshippers, who indeed fired at him volleys of abuse, with more than a little mud and stones. The old Arab, however, was equal to the task of caring for his stock-in-trade. Giving back insult for insult he took the center of the alleys with his camel while his son brought up the rear with display of teeth and steel, until they gained the shelter of the caravanserai of the desert men near the slave market.

Here space was procured for the three camels in the crowded lower court, and

Michael's captor bought oil and vegetables and coffee from the shops within the *serai* wall, enough for three men. Holding up the skirts of his long cloak, and using his tongue in lieu of elbows to clear a passage, he conducted his prisoner to the wide gallery that ran around the court, where in rows of cubicles, raised a foot or so off the floor, motley groups of visitors sat about dung fires, cooking each one a different thing with a different smell. The Arab ousted a worried looking Jew from the cell he selected for himself, and built up the fire started by the Jew who really was in the wrong *serai* and knew it and was glad to get off with a whole skin.

As soon as they had eaten their fill they trussed Michael up, and the son went off to see that their camels were not stolen or to steal others himself, and the sire squatted comfortably to listen to the scraps of talk that floated up from the coffee house within the arcade of the *serai*.

Michael could make nothing out of the bedlam of tongues, until a dandified janizary strolled past the cell, noticed the water-pipe of the old Arab and asked for a whiff in the name of Allah the Compassionate.

The elegant one had a fierce beard and a stock of blades and hand-guns in his girdle that would have aroused the instant envy of the boy who had left; moreover the taint of forbidden wine was heavy upon him.

"Set it between thy hands."

The Arab extended the stem of the hubble-bubble across Michael's prostrate form, so that the warrior was forced to squat on the other side of the prisoner, thus precluding a knife thrust from either.

The Arab, being in from the hills, desired to hear gossip, and he drew information from the janizary in such masterly fashion that Michael gave keen attention.

He heard that he was to be sold on the morrow, since a *Zineh* or festival began the next day, when all the shops were to be closed. This festival had been ordered by Sidi Ahmad, to celebrate the arrival of a courier from the sultan.

Sidi Ahmad, then, was in Aleppo.

Meanwhile the forces of the pasha were being ordered up from the Persian border and the Euphrates. A detachment of mamelukes had crossed over from Egypt and was waiting in Damascus for marching orders.

"The Sidi will strike a great blow when he goes against the Franks," boasted the warrior.

"True. The slaying of infidels is pleasing in the sight of Allah. And yet—and yet, the master of Aleppo has grown too great for Aleppo. It may be that he will also strike a blow for himself at Constantinople, and thou and I may yet serve Sultan Ahmad instead of Sultan Mustapha."

The janizary muttered and handed back the pipe stem after wiping it with his sleeve. Glancing around cautiously, he leaned over Michael to whisper:

"Then our backs would be strengthened—we would have a wiser head to lead the faithful. No man is as crafty as—the Wolf's Ear."

"Perhaps it is written."

"Aye, he is *ghazi*."

"In the hills there was talk of this and that. Some said Sidi Ahmad had been seen in Egypt, others that he had gone upon the sea for some purpose. He hides his thoughts."

"Allah, those were lies." The janizary opened his beard in a soundless laugh. "Sidi Ahmad has kept to the Wolf's Ear, like a squirrel to its nest. For months he has not mounted his horse. I have seen it."

The old Arab puffed at his pipe thoughtfully.

"When you look at a stone do you see a mountain? When you watch a horse can you answer for its master? Sidi Ahmad is one among ten thousand; you say he is here, and I must have dreamed by hasheesh when I beheld him riding like the devil of the air when the moon was last full."

"You must have dreamed, waggle-beard."

Michael was pleased that no one had word of the Cossacks as yet—if indeed they were nearing Aleppo. The two fell to talking of the riches of Sidi Ahmad, the Arab with an eye to thievery probing shrewdly at where the treasure was kept in the castle. But the soldier was cautious here.

"Where, if not under the hand of the *wazir*, the treasurer?"

"You are doubtless a captain of many. Only yesterday it is said that the *wazir* collected a new tax from the *suk*, the market-place. Allah alone knows how heavy are the money bags of Sidi Ahmad. The *wazir* must be tormented with doubt if the treasure is guarded by men—surely

he has hidden it, while Sidi Ahmad was absent."

"Fool! The pasha has not left the Wolf's Ear. Gold dinars and costly jewels are to be his sinews. With them he can buy swords and swordarms."

"True. And yet I have not counted more than a score of guards about the tower that is called the Wolf's Ear."

"Few can be trusted. And now—the Peace!"

The janizary rose a little unsteadily and swaggered off. When Michael turned over to ease his cramped limbs he beheld the son of the thief squatting in the shadows, inspecting the most valuable of the daggers that the warrior had worn in his belt. The old man nodded approvingly and returned to the gentle sputtering of his pipe.

BUYERS in the *suk* were few, because every householder was busied in laying out the best of his rugs and hangings, in stall and balcony to prepare for the festival.

Some felt of Michael's muscles, as he stood, naked to the waist in the glaring sun above the two Arabs who knelt at ease. But they passed on after learning the price of the Frankish slave. Others stared curiously at his strange hat and long boots, and walked on to where women were offered. Michael saw dark-haired Armenians, and statuesque Georgians, with many Persian maids standing near him; these waited patiently until a trade was made, then followed their masters off the square with the passivity of animals. Michael preferred to watch the riders that trotted by along the street leading to the castle gate.

His attention was drawn back presently by the crying of some Spanish girls, taken—he heard related—by a raid of corsairs on the coast of that country. Their mother had just been sold to a stout Turk, who was berating the slave merchant for the uproar caused by the children. Michael saw the trader strike the girls with his staff, and, instinctively he took a step toward them. Then, recollecting his plight, at a snarl from the Arab he turned back.

But not before the eye of a tall sheik, wrapped to the cheek-bones in the folds of his white robe, had fallen upon him. The newcomer strode over to Michael and studied him for a full moment.

"At what price is this one offered?"

The Arab called a thousand greetings upon the stranger and said that it was no more than two hundred dinars, that Michael had an excellent disposition, was strong as a horse, and——

"He has been a galley slave."

The stranger pointed to the thick wrists and gnarled arms of the cavalier.

"A hundred is enough, the tax to be paid by you——"

"O blind and small-of-wit——"

A powerful hand freed itself from the folds of the other's dress and the Arab's face changed visibly as he saw a seal ring on the thumb before his eyes.

"O father of blessings——"

"Deliver him to my men."

The stranger moved on, leisurely, with his long stride and was lost in the throng. Meanwhile a group of armed servants closed around the cavalier after paying the Arab his price, which he took dourly enough now that the man of the seal ring was gone.

But Michael did not move. Down the street came a clash of cymbals and a shouting of guards, pushing the crowd back. Those around him rose to peer at the commotion, and a joyful shout from the street was echoed in the market place. A body of janizaries moved into view, escorting a splendid white camel on which a canopy of carpets half-concealed the slender form of a woman.

"Way for the messenger of the mighty, the merciful Mustapha, Protector of Islam, Sword of Muhammad! Way for the distinguished *aga* and the gift he brings!"

So cried the soldiery, and the rabble roared in glee when the handsome noble on a blue-veined Arab barb—he who rode directly before the camel—began to cast handfuls of silver coin over the uplifted heads. Michael noticed that the *aga* sat his high-peaked saddle like a rider born, that his turban was sewn with pearls, and the fringe of his caftan glittered with gold thread.

"Allah's blessing upon the giver! Ten thousand welcomes to the *aga*, the victorious, the youthful lord, El Kadhr."

So cried the multitude, and Michael's eyes sparkled. The man who came as the Sultan's messenger was Demid.

His beard had been clipped short and parted in the middle, after the northern fashion, but no other disguise—save the garments, plundered perhaps from some

caravan on the way—was needed, for the face of the Cossack chief was lean, the dark eyes slanting—a heritage from some Tatar ancestor. His attire was that of a Turkoman chief and his manner, composed and slightly contemptuous, bore out the part.

Michael turned his attention to the rider on the camel. Lali had been furnished new garments, but the poise of her head was unmistakable although she was heavily veiled. Before her walked the two blacks, once more at ease despite their scars. Well for Demid, thought Michael, they were mutes. They had a tale for the telling!

Yet now they stalked proudly, aware of their importance—two eunuchs of the imperial court, unmistakable as such.

Alone, in that great throng, the cavalier did not call out. He could have made Demid hear, for the cortege passed within stone's throw. But to signal to the Cossack before those hundreds of vigilant eyes would be to place the chieftain in jeopardy at once. Michael remained silent, smiling a little as he understood the trick by which Demid had entered Aleppo. He had merely taken the place of the *aga*, who had been slain on the galley—the officer who had had Lali in his charge. But Ayub and the other Cossacks were not visible, and Michael wondered what part they were to play.

"The Sidi will have a warm welcome for this bringer of gifts," spoke up some one near him. "It is said that El Kadhr had a wolf's fight with a band of unbelievers in the hills and overthrew them, after all but these few of his men were slain."

A savage shout gave token of the joy of the Moslems at this feat of the *aga*, and Michael, listening, grew thoughtful. In this way Demid had explained his lack of escort; the janizaries he must have picked up near the city. But, successful in passing the gates of Aleppo, where no other Christians were suffered to enter except as slaves, he was now in the center of a fanatical mob that would tear his limbs apart at a slip of the tongue or a false move.

All at once Michael was aware that Demid had seen him. The gaze of the *aga* had passed over the slaves and lingered a second on the cavalier. Tossing some silver toward the clamoring Arab younglings he rode on without a sign of recognition.

Another moment and he checked his horse, where the multitude at the road leading up to the castle held up the cavalcade. Stooping he spoke swiftly to one of the officers of the guards, handing the man at the same time a purse from his girdle.

The janizary made a sign of obedience, looked around at Michael and made his way back to the *suk*. Swaggering as one who had just been noticed by the messenger of the sultan, he approached the Arab.

"How high is the bidding for this Frank?" he asked curtly.

The desert man fingered his beard thoughtfully, and seeing no loss in talk, drew the soldier a little aside from the Turkomans who were still staring after the envoy.

"Three hundred gold pieces, to you, my friend, and the tax on you. You have seen how docile he is——"

"I have here two hundred and twenty dinars. It is yours for the slave. The lord from the imperial city has given me command to buy this dog. The Frank crossed his glance with the *aga*, and perhaps made a spell upon him. So the lord from the imperial city has selected me to buy him, in order that he may be slain and the spell rendered of no account. The *aga*, El Kadhr, is a hater of the Nazarenes, as a man should be."

At this Michael's pulse quickened, for covetousness darkened the Arab's eyes, and he schemed palpably to avail himself of the new offer. The guards observed that Michael was standing by them, but took no notice of the merchant.

"Surely you have more than that in the purse," objected the desert man. "I saw the *aga* hand it to you. Is it not all for this Frank? The envoy is open of hand."

"By my beard, it is not so. And the tax is on you——"

"*B'illah!* What do you say?"

Inwardly cursing their quarreling, Michael listened to their rising voices in a feverish suspense.

"Allah! What words are these words. The door of bidding is closed!"

The leader of the Turkomans swung around and grasped Michael's shoulder.

"Dog of an Arab! Saw you not the *wazir's* ring?"

The desert man flung up his arms with a groan.

"Aye," he muttered to the puzzled janizary. "A dweller in the Wolf's Ear saw

fit to claim this slave for a fourth of his value. I have eaten wrong-dealing——"

"Which you will spew out again, father of thieving!" growled the Turkoman, and made a sign for his companions to close around Michael.

As they moved off Michael saw the janizary stop to curse the desert man, and then —well aware of the danger of crossing an official of the castle—stride away toward Demid. He had not gone far before a lithe, tattered figure stole after him, and stumbled over his heels. The blade of a knife flashed, and the purse which the soldier had tied to his girdle, dropped into the hand of the son of the Arab.

Michael, despite his disappointment, could laugh merrily at this. The butt of the Turkoman's spear smote his cheek, splitting the skin.

"O *caphar*, unbeliever, you can work your spells in the darkness under the Wolf's Ear. Hasten, for you will have an audience with your master."

So it happened on the day of the festival in Aleppo that the man with the signet ring passed into the gate of the palace wall, and after him Demid and his charge, and upon their heels, in a sad strait indeed but no whit disheartened, Sir Michael of Rohan.

IX

THE VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

A NIGHT and a day Michael waited for the interview with his new master. The chamber in which he had been confined without food was bare except for two hemp ropes suspended from the beams of the ceiling and ending in slip-nooses about a yard from the floor. Under the ropes lay two lengths of bamboo, tough and pliable. Under the bamboos was a thick veneer of dried blood—the mark of the bastinado, in which a prisoner was strung up by the ankles and beaten with the bamboos upon the soles of his bare feet until exhausted nerves gave way and he confessed, or lied to save himself.

At the end of the time a door opened and two armed negroes entered with cresset torches, signing for Michael to advance to the black square of the open portal. But on the threshold they stayed him, and he made out a figure in the shadows beyond.

This was a thin, stooped form draped in striped silk. A form with a beak of a face and a pinched mouth, seeming to droop under the weight of a massive green turban set with emeralds.

"The Sidi ibn Ahmad," grunted one of the slaves, "would have speech with thee."

Michael bowed and stood at ease, sniffing the odor of musk and opium, while two large eyes considered him.

"O Frank," said the Moslem sharply, "where are the *kazaks?*"

It startled Michael more than a little that this man should be aware he spoke *Turki*, and had knowledge of the raid of the Cossacks.

"Who knows," he replied musingly, "if not Allah?"

"You do."

"That is not true."

"Bah! Offspring of swine, the Sidi has eyes that can pierce beyond the hills. A band of *kazaks* rode toward Aleppo. Where did you leave them?"

"If you can see through the hills, then you can see them. I know nothing, O pasha."

"Dog of an unbeliever! You were in their company. What plans had they formed when you were taken from them?"

If, Michael thought, the pasha of Aleppo could not see beyond the Caucasus, he must have ears in every bazaar in Asia Minor. And this was close to the truth, for the man in the doorway was well served by spies.

"The chief of the *kazaks*," went on he of the turban, "is like a falcon, striking far from home. But where are his men?"

Michael, wondering if Demid's disguise had been pierced, only shook his head. Demid had been careful to say nothing of his plans to any one.

The man in the door snapped his teeth angrily and motioned to the guards to string Michael up. As they moved to do this, a high voice whispered something from the darkness behind the dignitary, who hesitated and drew back.

"We will not wheedle you like a woman. You have until the mid-morning prayer of the morrow to make up your mind to confess. When that time comes if you do not speak you will be drawn on the stake—"he paused, the pinched lips curving with relish—" by horses."

"Nay, not that!" cried Michael, starting.

"Aye, unbeliever. Prepare to taste *maut ahmar*, the bloody death."

The slaves drew back and the door

closed, leaving him to the shadows of the torture chamber and the contemplation of the bastinado ropes that now seemed luxurious compared to the fate in store for him. He wondered who the unseen speaker had been—for who would countermand an order of Sidi Ahmad, within the palace?

"Perhaps a woman," he reasoned.

To be drawn on a stake by horses, before a throng of watching Turks! Michael gritted his teeth. Hanging was better, and yet—and yet, he would not play the part of a coward. If he could make up a false tale—but instinct warned him that the pasha was not to be hoodwinked.

"Ah, if they would put a blade in my hand, it would be a blessed thing."

He thought longingly of Demid, and the chance of having a weapon smuggled in through the grating of the window. Demid had tried to get him free, and speak with him—had taken a daring chance—but the Cossack could not know where he was confined.

"What a lad he is! God save him!" thought Michael admiringly, and wondered what plan the Cossack meant to follow.

Demid had done as he promised Ibnol Hammamgi—had passed openly through the gate of Aleppo and the wall of the castle, into the Wolf's Ear.

Perhaps Lali, who seemed to know all things, had an inkling of where the pasha kept his treasure; perhaps the singing girl could find out. Michael had reasoned that the treasure would lie in the tower or under it. He was quick of wit and he had noticed that the janizaries who brought him had turned over their prisoner to the personal slaves of Sidi Ahmad at the tower door.

He had used his eyes and had a fair idea of the plan of the palace, which was much like that of a medieval castle in England. At the rear a sheer cliff some twenty feet high rose from the slope of the hill. Above this were the terraced gardens of the palace itself, protected on the other three sides by a wall of solid marble blocks, too high to climb, too massive to beat in.

The road that led up to this wall from the alleys of Aleppo passed through the single gate, of iron-bound teak. Seen from the *suk* this gate seemed to be the eye of a wolf, the palace its skull, and the tower its ear.

The palace itself was small, forming three sides of a courtyard. The embrasures of the dungeon, set with iron bars, looked out upon the cedars and olive trees and the pleasant fountain of the courtyard. Michael could see no more than the tops of the trees and the spray of the fountain, for the opening was a spear's length over his head.

It seemed to him that the torture chamber was the base of the tower, as the walls were of massive black basalt and the columns supporting the ceiling were thick as buttresses, instead of the slender pillars of Arabic design. In fact the grim, black tower with its rounded cupola was like nothing else in Aleppo. Perhaps it had been built centuries ago for an astrologer—certainly it served to guard Sidi Ahmad from assassins.

All at once Michael stiffened where he sat in a corner of the torture chamber. A slight sound had reached him, the muffled gritting of iron against stone. Often before when the chamber was in darkness he had heard this sound, but now he was aware of a breath of stale air that passed across his cheek.

As quietly as possible he rose to his feet, with an effort, for long fasting had sapped his strength. Too clearly to be mistaken he now heard the tinkle of a guitar, and a swelling voice, high and plaintive.

"From afar I watch for thy coming,
"O my lord!"

These were the first words of Lali's song and the sound of it came through the embrasure overhead. Michael felt for the heavy ropes that hung near at hand, put his foot in one of the loops and drew himself up by his arms until he could see out into the court.

Sidi Ahmad was giving a feast near the pool. Cresset torches held by motionless slaves revealed a company of Turkish officers, in colored silks and velvets, kneeling on carpets, listening to the song of the girl. Beside the host was Demid, the stem of a hubble-bubble in his hand.

Lali sat a little apart from the other slave girls, behind a screen of palms, and Michael noticed that, even while she sang for the pasha, her glance went to the Cossack. At the end of her song, while the guests were smiling and praising her to the slender Turk, Michael ventured to call to her softly:

"Daughter of Macari, a boon I crave of him who shared bread and salt with me—a

sword from him, passed through this grating. Give him that word."

Lali, rising, half turned her head toward the embrasure. Then, without response, she walked slowly to the feasters, adjusting her veil as she did so. The master of the palace gave command for a silver-sewn robe of honor to be brought her, and, receiving it, she bowed her dark head to the carpet. The officers of the janizaries and the dignitaries of the city lifted their hands and voiced courteous praise, for the grace of the girl could not be veiled.

"Hair blacker than the storm wind!"

"Eyes like a gazelle, softer than pearls——"

"Nay, she walks like the wind of dawn among the flowers!"

The host, sitting back in shadow himself, motioned Lali toward his slaves and leaned forward to present a costly gift to Demid, a simitar of blue steel, chased with gold. Michael groaned under his breath, for Lali had not ventured near Demid and he remembered that now the singing girl had been given to Sidi Ahmad, and it would be mortal offence for Demid to exchange a word with her.

Then a voice from near at hand spoke laughingly—

"O watcher of the feast, is there no ease for thy hunger?"

Michael looked down into the gloom of the torture chamber and slid to the floor. The speaker seemed to be within the wall.

"Tell Sidi Ahmad what he seeks of you, and go unharmed from Aleppo on the morrow."

"Who are you?"

"A prisoner like yourself, until my time comes. Aye, I have fled from daggers that would pierce these walls."

Now was Michael aware of the truth that an elusive memory had been whispering to him. He knew the man who spoke from the wall.

"You are Captain Balaban, the Levantine!" he cried.

A pause, broken by a low, amused laugh—

"Nay, unbeliever, I am Sidi ibn Ahmad."

GRIM was the palace of the Wolf's Ear, and dark the passageways beneath. Michael, hearkening to the lisp of lutes in the garden overhead, strained his eyes to make out the man who spoke to him, yet beheld only a black square where a secret door had opened away from the torture chamber. In this opening stood Captain Balaban, erstwhile captive of the Cossacks, and the gloom of the dungeon was not more forbidding than the whispering glee of his high-pitched voice.

Michael bethought him of several things: the talk of the Moslems in the caravanserai—that Sidi Ahmad had been on a journey from the Wolf's Ear. And the warning of Ibnol Hammamgi that the pasha kept his face hidden when he was in Aleppo. Also, he remembered the high honor accorded the Levantine when the man escaped to the Moslems of the corsair.

How better could Sidi Ahmad protect himself from assassins than by taking another name, and allowing one of his officers to pose as pasha during his absence?

"O dog of an unbeliever," went on the amused voice, "do you doubt my word? Would you see the signet ring of a pasha that I kept on a cord about my neck when I ventured among the Cossacks who guard the Christian frontier, to learn their strength? Or shall I summon my *wazir* who sits now on the carpet of honor in my stead—he who questioned you at my bidding?"

He clapped his hands and somewhere behind him a door opened, letting in a glow of candles. Michael saw that a section of the stone wall had been swung back upon its sockets, revealing a stair leading down past the dungeon. On a landing of this stair stood Balaban, robed in an Arab's cloak.

"Aye," the Moslem said, "I bought you of the thief in the *suk* and cheated him out of his profit—for you may be worth more than the price I paid. Verily, my word, a while ago, sentenced you to the stake—if you are fool enough to turn from my service."

He lifted a hand significantly.

"My word can save you from the stake. Consider this, O Nazarene: my star is rising in Asia, and men flock to me. Soon the green standard will be carried from Bagdad to Moscow, and I shall ride before the standard bearer. Eyes serve me in hidden places and lips whisper in the Wolf's Ear; but *my* eyes have shown me the weakness of your peoples, who flee from the sea before the corsairs."

"Can your eyes find Demid and the hand of Cossacks?"

"Yes, by Allah! Demid sits at the feast over our heads. Alone, on the frontier

his spirit is daring. Age the Cossack a bit and he would work harm, but now he is a fledgling flying before his time. I shall cut him down after you are staked."

Michael's heart sank, and his weariness grew upon him, for, indeed this man seemed to know all things.

"Consider again," the Levantine went on, fingering the scar upon his cheek, "that the Cossack drinks his fill without thought for you."

"A lie, that! Demid would strike a blow for me if he knew my plight."

A calculating light came into the Moslem's narrowed eyes.

"*Inshallah*, that we shall see. I shall bid the young hero to watch your torture on the morrow, and you will see that he stirs not—not so much as a hair of his beard. But I can put a sword in your hand, and give you a golden name. Aye, you may not lack a *pashalik* if you will acknowledge Mohammed, and turn to the true faith. One thing I ask, that you make clear where the bull Cossack and his dozen are hidden, for until now they have escaped my search."

"I shared bread and salt with them."

"Bah—what is faith? A word that dies on the lips. Lali, the young witch, sold you—I know not why. What faith do you owe her lover?"

"The word of Michael of Rohan!"

With that the cavalier stiffened his muscles and leaped at the man who mocked him. His body shot into the open door, but his cramped limbs were sluggish and Balaban, stepping back, brought down the flat of his blade upon Michael's skull. Searing flames shot through the vision of the little man, and then—darkness.

X

THE ZINEH OF ALEPPO

WHEN the middle of the morning came, and a captain of janizaries flung open the door of the prison, Michael walked forth steadily. He kept his head back, and by an effort of will stiffened his knees against trembling. Hunger, that had been an agony, left him and he did not feel weak; but, coming out into the glare of sunlight on the uppermost terrace, just under the castle wall, he was conscious of sweat starting out all over his limbs.

In the center of the terrace the blunt end of a ten-foot stake had been sunk into the earth at an angle, leaving the sharpened end projecting along the surface of the grass. Near at hand, slaves held the bridles of two Arab ponies, while others attached ropes to the breast-strap.

About this cleared space the guests of the night before sat on carpets in the shade of olive and lemon-trees; officers of the guard strolled around, swaggering, some with hawks on their wrists, for the latticed windows of the palace hid the women of Sidi Ahmad—soft-limbed girls of many races whose lustrous eyes would brighten at the spectacle of the torture.

Here and there negroes placed trays of sherbet and sweetmeats before the watchers, and Michael heard voices crying wagers—how long would he endure before crying out. Beyond the low line of foliage, he beheld again the white minarets, the gold and purple domes of the Moslem city, and, like an echo upon the breeze came the faint cry of the caller-to-prayer:

"Allah is the only god; and Mohammed is his prophet . . . prayer is good . . . the hour of prayer is at hand . . ."

A drone, as of multitudinous bees, arose from the streets below, where hundreds of worshippers were facing toward Mecca.

The spectators on the terrace arose and salaamed. The bird-like man—who acted the part of Sidi Ahmad—had appeared in the shadows under the trees, and with him Demid. The Cossack left his host and strolled over to inspect the stake and the horses. Michael's gaze flew to him and lingered, while, absently, he noticed that Demid wore two swords, his own and the simitar of honor bestowed by the master of the feast the evening before.

This struck Michael as strangely ridiculous.

"Two swords—and one man—one sword too many, i'faith!"

He wagged his head, and a chuckle arose in his throat. The guards looked at him askance, and a mameluke, in a fur-tipped *khalat* strolled over to stare his fill at the victim of the *maut ahmar*.

"A comely dog," the dark-faced warrior from Egypt muttered, caressing a gold chain at his throat, "but too lean in the limb—his bones will crack like a chicken's. I have seen——"

He confided, low-voiced, to one of the

Turks what he had seen in the way of torture visited upon other Nazarenes. Michael's voice croaked.

"*Yah khawand*, a word with yonder noble, El Kadhr. I who go to the Severer of Life ask it."

"Will you confess the hiding-place of the pig *kazaks?*"

Michael shook his head, not caring to trust his voice again. He wished to warn Demid that Balaban was in Aleppo and that Balaban was Sidi Ahmad; but when he took an uncertain step forward toward his friend, nausea seized on him.

"Wine!" he whispered. "A cup of wine before the ordeal."

"To hear is to obey!"

The janizary whispered something to one of the palace slaves, who presently fetched a silver goblet from the courtyard. Michael seized it and raised it to his lips with a hand kept steady by the utmost effort of his will. Within the cup was vinegar.

Michael quivered and hurled the silver goblet at the Moslem who had tricked him, and the mameluke smiled, beholding his musk-scented companion soaked with the vinegar.

"Eh, there is a devil in this prince of unbelievers! Nay—" as the other, red with rage, strove to draw sword—"this Frank is to be spared for the fate that awaits his kind."

Perceiving the attention of the throng on him for a second, the warrior of the *khalat* made a mock salaam before Michael.

"I pray your honor's honor to ascend the throne prepared for you. Ho, Moslems, give heed to this dog-coronation!"

A ripple of mirth passed over the savage faces, and merciless eyes fastened on the prisoner. Pleased with his own wit, the mameluke leaned forward to pull the stubble of beard that had grown on Michael's chin.

"Will you go forward to the stake, or shall I bid the palace wenches hither to whip you on?"

For a second the thought of angering the soldier—provoking him to use his sword—came to Michael. But then he was aware that by going to the stake he might speak to Demid, who had recognized him before now.

Michael crossed himself, and, followed closely by a janizary and the mameluke, walked up to the stake. Now he saw that Demid's face was tense, and that the Cossack's eyes were smoldering even while he stood with folded arms.

A high-pitched voice, rife with amusement, floated from one of the palace windows.

"Where are the *kazaks*, O Nazarene?" Sidi Ahmad asked.

Michael halted and from very weariness leaned on the stake, while the slaves pulled forward the ropes attached to the horses.

"*Here is a Cossack!*"

It was thus that Demid spoke for all to hear, and answered the question of Sidi Ahmad. And before his lips closed on the words, his two swords were out of their sheaths. Michael never knew how the blades were drawn so swiftly, because he did not see Demid's left hand drop to the hilt of the simitar on his right side, and the other hand to the sword of honor, on his left hip.

Nor did Michael see which blade it was that struck off the head of the mameluke, sending it rolling over the grass. But he did notice that one of the simitars struck down the weapon the janizary drew, and then passed across the silk vest of the Moslem warrior. The curved blades seemed only to stroke the man, but its razor edge severed the abdominal muscles and left the janizary dying on his feet, still staring in blank amazement.

Demid whirled on the slaves and struck one down; the remaining Moslem took to his heels, but tripped and fell, such was his dread of the steel that had taken the lives from three in thrice as many seconds.

"Two swords—one man," Michael muttered, still in a half stupor.

For a brief moment the Cossack and the cavalier stood alone by the stake, but already men were recovering from their amazement and rising to their feet under the trees. Sidi Ahmad, the clever, had indulged his whim to test Demid a trifle too far, and the Cossack knew how to use the minute of time that was worth more than the treasure of Sidi Ahmad to him.

"Can you stick to a horse's back?" he cried at Michael who was stumbling toward him. "Grapple the mane, but stick!"

With that he gave his comrade a hoist up, to the nearest pony. The other horse had shied at the smell of blood, but Demid ran to him, caught the dangling bridle, and glanced over his shoulder.

"On your faces, dogs," he roared at the

oncoming guards. "A Cossack *ataman* rides through you. On your faces!"

He pointed to the prostrate forms around the stake and a shout of anger answered him. Perhaps the rage inspired by his challenge hampered the effort of the Moslems on the terrace to get near, perhaps no one cared to be the first to step into the path of Demid's horse. They had grouped toward the road leading to the gate, and hither Demid started, taking the rein of his pony in his teeth.

But almost at once he swerved from his course, caught the rein of Michael's horse in one hand that held a sword and beat both beasts with the flat of the other blade. They struck into a short-paced trot, and passed between the in-running guards. Demid's sword flashed on either side, steel striking against steel, and one man fell.

The ponies lengthened their stride, guided by the superb horsemanship of the Cossack, and broke through the foliage of the terrace edge, taking the jump to the garden below, almost unseating Michael as they did so. Demid steadied his friend and headed toward the roadway, which was here unguarded. They reached it before their pursuers could come down from the upper level, and Michael saw that the gate in the main wall was open before them.

A shout from above brought out the warriors who had been squatting in the shade of the wall, but at that distance no command was heard clearly and no man thought to try to stop the notable El Kadhr, who galloped through the gate and down into the market-place.

OLD is Aleppo, mother of cities and father of thieves. Time has brought to its streets in turn the changing peoples of the earth, the Indian, the Parsi, the triumphant Israelite—saints and pharisees, princes and lepers—and the conquering Moslem. Each built upon the ruins of the other, and made of the city a labyrinth where alleys ran underground and bathing wells were the cisterns of former palaces. And where the caravans came, thither came the thieves.

Hither had come the old Arab who had stolen Michael of Rohan, and the boy Hassan, the Arab's son.

At mid-morning they were sleeping in their cubicle in the *serai* of the desert men, sleeping with one eye open, because the boy had cut a purse not long before from a soldier who might bring an accusation against them—and they had no desire to face a Turkish *khadi*, a judge who might have a memory for past crimes, and who would certainly have an itching palm. Also, they wished to lie low before venturing out that evening to join the procession of the Guilds, when quarrels and purses might be picked.

So the curtain was drawn across their compartment, but the weasel ears of the boy Hassan heard the trumpets blare from the direction of the palace.

"Allah," he muttered, yawning and spitting, "has caused something to happen. The trumpets have called for the city gates to be closed."

Horses' hoofs thudded in the alley underneath and entered the arcade of the caravanserai's shops, and passed on after a fragmentary pause. Both Hassan and his father, however, heard boots on the stone steps that led up to the gallery of the inn, and presently their curtain was snatched aside and two men entered, the leader being the Nazarene slave whom they had sold to the Turks. Michael had guided Demid to the only place of refuge known to him.

Demid strode across the chamber and jerked the old thief to his feet by the beard. The Arab's whiskers bristled, like an angry cat's, and he grasped at his weapons, when he recognized his assailant and hesitated.

"O *Aga*, what is this? It is not fitting to put the hand of violence upon the beard of age—*Ai*, spare the boy, O captain of men!" Hassan had started to knife Michael in the ribs and Demid bruised the lad's wrist with a backward slap of his simitar. "Verily, the youth is of tender years, and without guile. What wrong have we done?"

"Enough," whispered Demid curtly, and proceeded to disarm the desert man by undoing his girdle and letting the various knives and hand-guns fall to the floor. "Off with your garments."

"What madness is this?" The Arab looked anxiously at Michael, who had caught Hassan by the throat. The plight of the boy affected him more than the danger to himself, and, after a shrewd glance into the set face of the Cossack, he peeled off the hooded cloak, shirt and loose trousers.

Demid bade Hassan strip to his shirt, and kicked the weapons of the Arabs into a corner. Standing between his prisoners and

the entrance, he cast off his own valuable garments and the Arab's eyes glistened on beholding the jewel-sewn folds of the turban and the cloth-of-gold girdle.

When the Arab was naked, Hassan almost so, and the two fugitives clad in their clothing, Demid adjusted a veil about the lower portion of Michael's face, and turned to study the old man who without weapons and cloak looked very much like a shorn lion.

"Hearken, O father of trickery," he said quietly. "It is for you to cover the road of our flight with the dust of discretion. You have no love for Sidi Ahmad, and I am his foe."

"Then you are a fool, because within these walls you can not escape him," retorted the thief frankly, adding that the gates were closed.

"No more can he escape me," assented Demid, and even Hassan choked with astonishment. "You are the gainer by my garments, but wear them not abroad or show them, lest you be put into a shroud."

"*Mashallah!*"

"And these garments of the Frank, conceal them likewise. You will have your weapons back again. But as surety for your silence I will take with me this boy, your son, who must guide us to a place of good hiding."

At this the Arab wailed and fell on his knees, beating his head against the stone, and crying that Hassan was a piece of his liver, the very core of his heart.

"He will not suffer," said Demid grimly, "if we are not found by those who seek us out. If you betray us I will cut his body open and lay him out by the butchers' quarter where the dogs will——"

"*Ai-al* Allah prosper thee, harm him not, and the master of the Wolf's Ear can not make me speak. By my beard, upon the Koran I swear it!"

"Good. I am not a breaker of promises: see to it that you are likewise."

While he spoke, Demid thrust the sword given him by the Turks under his cloak, signed for Michael to do likewise with the other weapon, and pushed his beard behind a fold of the voluminous garment. Picking up a cord, he bound one end about the wrist of Hassan and the other to Michael's sash.

"Stoop when you walk, my friend," he said, "and speak thickly if one addresses you. Look upon the ground, and wonder not. The reason for this will be known to you when we reach the only place that is safe in Aleppo."

It was not hard for Michael to counterfeit weariness, and they passed unnoticed out of the gallery, through the courtyard, into the crowded alley. Demid caught snatches of talk that told him how their horses had been found not far from here, but as they had dismounted at the end of the arcade where deep shadow had hidden them, no one was sure where the prisoners had gone. Even as they turned away, a detachment of janizaries pushed through the throngs and entered the *serai*. A *miskal* of gold had been promised the one who found El Kadhr and the escaped Frank.

Demid however, loitered along and stopped to buy some dates and rice for Michael. When Hassan came up, leading the supposedly sick man, Demid whispered to the boy to show the way to the Gate of Victory. And Hassan gave proof that the byways of Aleppo were well known to him.

From one arcade to another, down into a dark wine cellar, thence through a passage to a coffee house—where Demid took time to sit and drink a bowl—up into the quarter of the saddlers and shield-makers where hides, hung up to dry filled the air with a stench greater than that of the hovels they had left—from there to the covered court of a bathhouse he led them.

Men stopped him, to ask questions, but the boy's wit found a ready answer and Demid took the center of the alleys, reeling along like a desert man who had sat up with the wine bowl the night before.

"To the well of the lepers," he muttered, drawing up to Hassan.

The boy shivered, but just then a group of the palace guards came up to search the bath and he turned aside among the heaps of cinders from the bathhouse fires, to a nest of clay hovels grouped around a square hole in the ground. Steps led down this excavation, and Michael flattened against the wall when a mournful figure climbed up past him—a man with loose, white-blotched flesh and swollen lips, who grunted from a tongueless mouth.

At the bottom of the steps where shadow gave a little relief from the sun squatted other foul shapes, watching with lackluster eyes several of their companion lepers bathing in the sunken well. Hassan sought out a corner as far as possible from

the sick men, and Michael watched Demid stagger up and lie down beside him.

A drunken Arab and another leper with a boy for guide aroused no interest in the unfortunate people of the well, and no questions were put to the three.

Demid waited until Michael had eaten a little, and then rolled over to whisper: "Sleep will help you, for you are weary. Yet hearken first to what is to be done. The fight at the stake can not change my plans because Lali acts with us, and we may not get word to her before night."

"Lali—do you trust her?"

"Why not? She could have betrayed me, yet she has been faithful."

"Aye, she had me taken from Sivas and sold! She was jealous, because you cherished me."

Demid swore under his breath.

"What a girl! There is a demon in her, and she boasted of her prank to me, then wept because she was not forgiven. We were close upon the heels of your caravan when the Arabs raided it; then I made Lali play the spy upon them, and bring us the tidings that you were being taken to Aleppo. The *rahb*—the fast camels went too swiftly for our pursuit. Yet that is past and now we have work to do."

He cuffed Hassan, who had crept closer to listen, upon the ear and promised him a bath in the lepers' pool if he tried to overhear what was said.

"I owe you my life," said Michael, starting to hold out his hand but remembering that he was a leper for the time being.

Demid wrinkled his nose and spat.

"Hide of the ——, what a smell is here. I would rather bed down with the goats of —— than in here. Nay, you saved my skin on the galley when I was burdened with the girl. You owe me naught."

"Balaban!" Michael started, at mention of the galley. "He is here and he is the pasha, Sidi Ahmad. The other is a mask in his place."

"I saw that."

Demid was silent for several moments, his lips set in hard lines as he listened to the tale of what had befallen his friend. "So we had the leader of these Moslems on the galley, and knew it not. The thought came to me at the Cossack camp that Balaban was a spy. So I took him with us, to point out the way across the sea, and he escaped our hand."

The young Cossack frowned, gnawing at his beard, his arms crossed on his knees.

"*Ai* this is an evil place. Here there was once the church of a Christian saint, and now over its ruins stands a nest of thieves. How is that to be endured?"

His dark eyes fell moody, and Michael knew that one of the fits of brooding had gripped him. Yet the Cossack was not thinking of the opportunity he had lost. He was musing upon the work to be done, and this he explained to Michael, slowly, making sure that the cavalier understood the part he was to play. Demid never hurried himself or his men. When the time for quick action came he took the offensive at once, Cossack fashion; but, always, he had thought out beforehand what was to be done.

So it seemed to his enemies that he acted on impulse, and they spoke of him as a falcon that strikes on swift wings from an open sky; but even that morning at the stake he had seen in his mind's eye how Michael might be saved. In this he was different from Michael, who—utterly daring as Demid—acted altogether on impulse.

"This night," said the Cossack, "we will lift the treasure of Sidi Ahmad."

" 'Swounds! That disguise of yours will never pass you into the Wolf's Ear!"

Demid nodded.

"True, my friend, and that is why Sidi Ahmad will not look to find me within the Wolf's Ear. So, the fight at the stake has aided us, when all is counted—aye, because it has given a messenger to send to Ayub and my children."

"What messenger?"

"You, a leprous man."

Michael shivered, for the well of the lepers did not strike him as much better abiding place than the torture stake.

"Where have you quartered Ayub and his blades—in the lazar house?"

"Nay, with the dead, in the burial place of the Moslems without the city wall. Even Sidi Ahmad did not think to search the grove of trees among the tombs on yonder hill by the *Bab el-Nasr*. The Moslem warriors do not visit the graves, and the women who go there fear the spirits of the place. Ibnol Hammamgi told me of it—he has taken to cover there, in other days."

"Good!" Michael grinned a little, thinking of Ayub. "But that is without the gate, and the gate is closed."

"Hassan will open it."

"With what?"

"With you, O my companion of the road. You will be a leper, about to yield life; he will be your son, taking you to the ditch in the burial place wherein those who are unclean are laid while they still breathe. To rid themselves of you, the guards at the gate will open it a little, unseen, because it will be dark by then."

"And after that——"

Demid took up the dates left by Michael, who had eaten what he dared, and fell to munching them.

"First there is a tale to tell."

AND it was a tale that banished all desire for sleep from the weary Michael.

A generation after Christ, the body of St. George was laid in a tomb in one of the cities of the Israelites. When the wave of Moslems over-swept the land, the Turks heard of the legend of *al-khidr*, the Emir George, and sought for the tomb but did not find it. The Armenians, however, who took refuge from the invasion in the northern mountains knew the situation of the tomb of the warrior saint, and during the crusades pilgrims from their folk visited it—until the order of the Sultan of the Turks forbade Christians to enter Aleppo. So much Demid had heard from the *batko*—the priest of the Cossacks.

The tomb was at the base of the tower which now formed the Wolf's Ear, a dozen feet or more underground.

At the time of the Moslem conquest, the last Christians to leave the tower had screened the entrance to the stair leading down to the tomb as well as they could. But since the pasha's palace had been built around the tower, Ibol Hammangi had heard that the stair had been uncovered.

The *cral* had ventured once with the Armenian patriarch in disguise to penetrate to the site. The patriarch knew of another entrance, also covered up by rocks that led in from the hillside behind the palace at the base of the cliff. They had been able to remove the protecting boulders unseen by the guards of the palace above, and had made their way up a short passage to the vault, only to find that the inner door could not be opened from the outside.

It was on leaving the passage, after replacing the rocks, that Ibnol Hammamgi had been seized and tortured by janizaries. During his captivity Ibnol Hammamgi had used his good eye and his ear to advantage and suspected that the tower was now a treasure vault of Sidi Ahmad.

"FAITH!" cried Michael of Rohan, "the one-eyed mountain goat has the right of it! The torture chamber where I lay may be the chapel of St. George, and the tomb must be below it. Aye, I mind that Sidi Ahmad passed at times up and down a stair into which a door opened from the place of torture."

He described how he had encountered the master of the Wolf's Ear the evening before and Demid listened attentively.

"The stair leads higher, into the tower," Michael added thoughtfully. "The Moslems built it upward, I'll wager odds on 't, when they turned the chapel into a dungeon. Well for you they did. Small good it would do you, Demid, to enter the vault and pass through the door into the dungeon. They would crown you in my place on the stake."

"Aye," responded the Cossack slowly as was his wont. "From the sepulcher the stair will take me high in the tower—the treasure of Sidi Ahmad is bulky, ivory, silks from India, gold plate from Persia—and —— knows what else. He would keep it in a place apart."

"Saw you such a place in the Wolf's Ear?"

Demid shook his head.

"Faith! Ibnol Hammamgi found the tomb door closed against him. How then will you enter?"

"Lali will come to the other side. She has pledged it."

It had been agreed between them that the Armenian girl was to make her way down the stair at the beginning of the second watch of that night, and open the portal to Demid.

"The fox, Sidi Ahmad can not trust his officers with his secret—there is no faith between them—so the place of the treasure must be hidden. Lali will find out what may be discovered. At that hour the procession of the Guilds—the weapon-makers, the gold spinners, the saddlers, will pass through the terraces before the palace as is customary on this day of the year. Many within the palace will have their eyes on the festival—on the lamps, and their ears will heed the kettledrums and pipes."

"Even so, what if Lali whispers one word to Sidi Ahmad——"

"She could not go back to her people. The girl has a spirit of flame, there is nothing she will not dare. Besides, she has a longing to go back to her tribe. We will see."

And Demid, in a whisper, told Michael what he must do to aid him. At first the cavalier said stubbornly that he would not leave him, but the Cossack pointed out that Michael's presence would be of small use if he failed in the Wolf's Ear, whereas if he won clear he would need Michael and the men, to escape from the city. Besides, if no messenger were sent to the warriors, they and Ayub would remain on the hill outside the wall until they were discovered and slain.

"They had an order," he added gravely.

"Egad," thought Michael, "and so have I."

"Keep Hassan by you until the last; so long as you have him the Arab will not lift his voice against us."

XI

AYUB ISSUES A CHALLENGE

AFTER sunset when the heat began to pass from the baked streets of Aleppo, the light and tumult of the festival arose and swelled through all the quarters of the guilds, even to the gate, *el Nasr*, formerly the Gate of the Jews but named otherwise by Saladin the Great.

The flickering lamp against the iron fretwork of the portal—the lamp kept lighted since the day of the prophet Elisha—vied with the colored lanterns of a puppet show before which lean Arabs and stout Osmanlis stood gravely, bubbling, however, with inward mirth.

A party of saddlers assembled in the *faya*, the cleared space just within the gate, sweating under their sugar-loaf hats and tiger skins and the burden of a float manned by several agile buffoons, who cracked jokes with the half-dozen janizaries on guard at the post.

Other lamps appeared on the balconies of the nearest houses, where veiled women sat, and occasionally a shrill voice rose over the monotonous tinkling of a guitar.

Nimble-footed urchins scurried about in the throng, wielding pig bladders inflated and tied to sticks, casting wary glances when a silence fell at the bulk of the Wolf's Ear, which, apart from the merry-making, showed black as a bat's wing against the glowing sky over the hills. But Hassan, the Arab was not among them.

Hassan came limping toward the gate in bedraggled garments, snuffling and tearing at his hair. Behind him staggered a slender figure, veiled. The throng gave back as the two neared the gate and the child's cry could be heard.

" 'Way for him who goes to the mercy of Allah! Riwan hath opened the gate of mercy to this one. *Ai-al!*"

He tugged valiantly at the rope which seemed to drag the figure of the leper along. Shrewdly enough, Hassan, on seeing that the *faya* was alight and crowded, had abandoned the idea of secrecy and made outcry sufficient for a half-dozen deaths. Moreover he did not make the mistake of asking that the portal be opened. But he edged closer to the janizaries who drew back with oaths.

"Child of misfortune. Cover the fire of disease with the water of solitude."

"*Ai-al* I am *his* son!"

"A lie escaped thy tongue." They began to curse the weeping boy and his ill-omened familiar. "You are the son of all stupidity."

"I know not where to go."

"Allah!" One of the maskers spoke up feelingly. "Instruct the boy in what he should do. The leper is far gone: let him go out to the burial place of the unclean."

Here Hassan began to wail the louder, and the crowd began to revile the guards who did not open the gate.

"It is forbidden!" growled the one in command.

"So also is a dying leper forbidden within the city."

"This may be the Frank on whose capture is the price of ten slave girls."

"O pack-saddle of an ass! The warrior Frank was tall as a spear; this one is like an ape."

The janizary hesitated, and for a moment Michael feared that Hassan might betray him; but the boy remembered very well that the cavalier had a simitar under his cloak, and, besides he had heard his real father swear an oath on the Koran. That was binding on Hassan as well.

"*He* can not speak," Hassan forestalled the soldier's intention of questioning the

supposed leper. "Lift the veil and you will see how his tongue is rotted away, and the bone sticks through his nose."

The horrors of the lepers' well were still vivid in Hassan's mind, and his voice shook. When Michael took it upon himself to make some uncouth noises the janizary drew back quickly.

"*Darisi bashine*—the grain may have been reaped by thee! Go, the two of you! Open the gate to them!"

"Where shall we go?" whined Hassan.

"*Mashallah!* Where but to the burial hill yonder—behold the grove of pistachio trees against the sky-line."

So the two slender figures passed under the flickering lamp of Elisha, out into the void of darkness, and the hub-bub at the gate resumed its even key. It was a weary climb for the tired Michael, up the path to the shrines and stones of the cemetery, and for some time they stumbled around, feeling their way toward the blotch of the grove.

Here Hassan gave a real yell of alarm and the skin prickled on Michael's back. From the deeper gloom ahead of them issued the call of animals and they heard the whining of panthers, the grunting of camels and the *whirr* of wings. Hassan, knowing that no beasts larger than jackals were in the thickets, started to flee and the rope pulled his companion headlong.

Perforce, they both halted, and the boy whimpered when a muffled screech sounded from a tree almost overhead; but Michael remembered the Cossacks' trick of mimicking animal calls and cried Ayub's name softly.

Presently the giant Cossack *ataman* loomed over them and Hassan quivered, believing firmly that now he was about to be carried off by the *djinn*—for he never thought a man could be as huge as Ayub.

"Are the men safe?" whispered Michael.

Ayub ran a hard hand over the cavalier's face, and grunted with pleasure.

"—— fly away with me if it isn't the little Frank behind a woman's veil. Have you wine—meat? Is it a feast day in the city? Then lead us to the frolic."

Other Cossacks crowded up, to salute Michael and stroke his shoulders in high glee at seeing him safe again.

"As I live," rumbled Ayub, shaking his head sadly, "we have played at ghosts until our own skins crept each cock-crow—not a single pretty woman came to pray at the graves in all the three days. Not a lass."

"How could you tell, father?" asked one of the younger warriors. "They were all wrapped up."

"How could I tell? Eh, I can judge what lies behind a Turkish veil, as well as you can tell your nag from another. When I was on a raid in Trebizond, the maidens used to nudge me in the streets so hard that my ribs would have given out if I had not worn a mail shirt. And how is my grand-daughter?"

"Your grand-daughter? What kin have you below the sea?" Michael did not understand the big Cossack.

"Eh, what kin? Why, aforetime, when I raided the Black Sea with Rurik—God break his chains for him—I left sons and daughters in every Turkish port where the women were above ordinary, and by now they have children of their own."

The warriors, clustering restlessly around their leaders, smiled, knowing that Ayub was more afraid of a woman than of a *chambul* of Tatars. Michael reflected that the veteran must have kept up the spirits of the detachments rarely in the trying time of waiting for orders.

"That is why," added the giant gravely, "the Turkish knights have grown so notable of late."

"Aye, grandfather," Michael grinned, "you were a great man in your time."

"In my time? May the dogs scratch you, Mikhail! You are no bigger than a flea and I could break you on my thumb-nail." He breathed heavily a moment, and went on. "But I spoke of my grand-daughter Lali. When she bade us farewell to go off to Sidi Ahmad, she wept like a ewe lamb under the shearer, and I kissed her like a grandfather, not otherwise. She is a good witch, and I will salt down the Turk that harms her."

"She is to open the postern door to Demid, and we are to contrive to pass through the nearest gate of Aleppo, to ride around to join him at the fourth hour of darkness."

Michael explained Demid's plan, realizing for the first time the odds against them. It pleased the Cossacks rarely, and they remarked that they would brew a fine beer for Sidi Ahmad to quaff.

"Sidi Ahmad is really Balaban, so strike when you see him."

"Eh, that hedgehog? I warned Demid

that we should slice him but the mad fellow would not listen."

Ayub fell moody at this, and became silent as Michael cautioned the warriors to wrap their scabbards and take care to ride without noise as they approached the gate.

"Our scabbards are leather and the boys have hunted Tatars often enough to stalk a gate without making a hub-bub," he remarked stiffly, "but as you are taking over the detachment, we are at command and will do as we are ordered."

"At command, little father," repeated the Cossacks readily.

But Michael understood that Ayub was offended.

"Not so, Ayub," he responded, against his better judgment. "You will be *ataman* as before, and I will guide you to the place."

They decided to leave one man with the spare horses—they had two to a warrior—at the base of the burial hill, a pistol-shot from the gate. A scout sent down toward the *Bab el Nasr* reported that the revelry within the gate had died down, and Michael reflected that the throngs of Moslem must have gone off to watch the procession at the castle.

The Cossack who had acted as scout said that the guard had just been changed, and this meant the third hour of the night had been reached. They were to meet Demid at the beginning of the fourth hour.

"Time," announced Ayub, prompted by Michael's whisper. "Time to mount and go."

In the dense gloom under the trees the word was passed among the warriors. Here and there a pony stamped and a saddle creaked, then fell silence broken by the snuffling of the horses which were restive after the long idleness. Ayub repeated his instructions in a low voice.

They were to go down in column of threes, the new *essaul* in advance of the men, within hearing of Ayub and Michael who took Hassan with them. On approaching the gate the leaders would dismount and go forward with the Arab, and they would contrive to have the portal opened. At the first shout, or rattle of weapons, the *essaul*—the old warrior, Broad Breeches was to bring up his men on the gallop and rush the gate regardless of who stood in his path.

As Ayub had said, the men from the Don descended the hill and walked their horses along the highroad without so much as a rattle of a bridle chain or clink of a weapon. Yet Michael knew that by now their sabers were drawn. He wondered what Balaban was doing—Balaban who had sworn that time would bring his revenge—Balaban who had eyes and ears in every secret place, and in whose power Demid now stood.

When the wall loomed up, he whispered to the sergeant to halt his men, and dismounted, feeling weariness in every fiber. The blood was pounding in his head and he had a mad desire to rush on the iron portal and shout, to end the suspense.

Pulling himself together, he consulted with Hassan instead. That cool youngster pointed out that the gate was formed of open iron scroll-work, and offered to creep up and try to turn the key in the lock on the inner side.

Michael assented and the three made their way forward cautiously, keeping to the side of the highway where the glow of the lamp over the portal would not fall on them. They heard a half-dozen Moslems talking lazily on the other side, but no one was on watch at the threshold because Aleppo was barred in of nights and people of the countryside never approached the walls.

The boy crept along the base of the wall and stood up, to thrust his arm slowly through the fretwork. A low whisper told Michael that the key was not in place.

By mischance one of the guards happened to look toward the gate, and made out the shadow of Hassan, cast by the lamp.

"*Kubar-dar!* Take care! What is there?"

The half-dozen janizaries hurried up on the other side and Michael drew back against the granite blocks of the gate pillar where he could not be seen. Hassan wisely kept his place.

"Allah be praised," the boy cried loudly, "I have come in time. The *kazaks* are hiding in the burial hill, where I went with the leper my father. I have come with the tidings. Take me to Sidi Ahmad that I may have a reward."

"Who art thou?"

"Hassan, the Arab, who passed out two hours since. Be quick."

"Still thy crying, whelp."

The man laughed and Michael knew him to be the janizary who had smoked with the Arab in the *serai*. As before the soldier reeked of forbidden liquor, and the key he

took from his girdle rattled in the massive lock.

"I will see to the matter of a reward for tidings of those accursed swine, the *kazaks*——"

"Accursed swine yourself!" boomed Ayub indignantly, out of the darkness.

The big Cossack had been growing restive as a horse and the insult was too much for his patience.

"Open this cage and I'll cut your bristles——"

Michael started and swore under his breath. No help for it—the janizary gave a shout and jerked to free the key. But in the same instant the cavalier passed his simitar through the iron-work and through the body of the officer.

Pulling it free, he turned the key in the lock with his left hand, and Ayub shoved mightily at the gate. The janizaries pressed it on the other side; swords flashed and Michael turned aside a thrust that would have split his companion's head.

Then he caught Ayub by the arm and flung himself aside with the Cossack as horses raced up and their followers spurred against the gate. It swung open under the weight of the horses, and for a minute there was rapid sword play.

Several of the Moslems turned to flee but were cut down by the riders and soon there was no other sound than the heavy breathing of the horses within the deep shadow of the wall. The bodies of the guards were pulled out of sight and Michael was satisfied that the fight had been ignored by any who had heard it within the near-by alleys. Brawls among the jazinaries were commonplace and this was the night of the *zineh*. Hassan had betaken himself elsewhere, unharmed.

Posting two of the Cossacks at the wall where they could not be seen, he ordered the *essaul* to close the gate and guard it until they returned.

Broad Breeches saluted, and drew back reluctantly as they trotted off keeping to the cleared ground by the wall where no one could see them against the lights of the alleys. They went through the quarter of the Jews, where the houses were shut and barred during the festival and the folk within doors. Once or twice they avoided patrols of janizaries, and fumbled through blind arcades where lights gleamed from cellars and the reek of opium was in the air. Beggars started up out of stairways and stared in bewilderment at the huge bodies of the dark riders, the high black hats and the gleaming sabers.

No Cossacks had penetrated into Islam before and the rumor spread in the alleys that the *djinn* had come down from the air and were riding winged steeds toward the palace.

But Michael and his men outstripped the rumors, and, guided by the dark bulk of the Wolf's Ear, reached the steep, rock-strewn slope that led to the rear of the palace. Here they halted under some plane trees and Michael ordered five of the ten to dismount and follow him.

Climbing the slope as Demid directed, he moved under the base of the tower, to where he could touch the wall. Then, spreading out his followers he searched among the heaped boulders until he came to a hollow in deep shadow, where small rocks were piled on either side the depression. Here the air was colder and, dropping into the depression, he felt the mouth of a narrow passage, open before him.

And he heard the clash of weapons from within, and the triumphant shout of Moslems.

"*Ekh!*" cried Ayub, heedless of caution. "Demid is betrayed!"

XII

A woman's wit is sharp as the dagger of a Rifi thief; a woman's soul is like a covered mirror wherein no man can behold truth with his eyes until the veil is drawn.

JAL-UD-DEEN, the treasurer of Sidi Ahmad, was taking a reading of the stars in the cupola of the tower when the third hour of the night drew toward its close. His vulture-like skull gleamed under a red lamp as it bent over a Persian zodiac, and a table of the movements of the planets.

Glancing up from time to time, he peered from an open square in the dome at the pin points of fire in the heavens that were stars. Old was Jal-ud-deen, old and shrewd and cautious. Skilled in astrology, he was about to take the reading of Sidi Ahmad's birth star.

"Fortune has served me," murmured the pasha. "Aye, time brings its fulfillment and the day when my standard will be raised in Islam."

Lying full length on a sofa, only his eyes

moved as he watched the labor of the man who had taken his name and place until this time should come, so that Sidi Ahmad should be alive to reap the fruits of his efforts.

"O lord of the planets—mirror of the glory of Allah," murmured the savant, "that which is written will come to pass."

"And what is written?"

"The message of the stars is not clear. A portent lies under my hand, and within the hour——"

"Nay, I will name the portent for you." Sidi Ahmad smiled, well content. "It is good. The Shah of Persia, with whom thou hast been negotiating, hath poured water on his sword. He will aid me. So will the mamelukes of Egypt and the beys of Tripoli."

The *wazir*, marking down his observations on a sheet of parchment, inclined his head.

"Within the vault below the tower, O favored of Allah, thou hast a hundred thousand swords."

Sidi Ahmad started, and then smiled approval.

"Aye, wealth to buy them. And the confidence of the Sultan Mustapha to use them. At the imperial city they say that he who controls the janizaries of the court rules Islam. For a time I feared the king of kings, who made gifts of a dagger's point to other pashas of Aleppo, but to me he sent a damsel who is like the moon."

The astrologer frowned.

"Why did the dog of a *kazak* burden himself with the maiden?"

"She was the surety of his mission—it would have put the shadow of doubt on his tale had he appeared in Aleppo without the woman."

Sidi Ahmad fingered the scar on his cheek thoughtfully.

"Before the night is past my men will have thrust a spear into every corner of Aleppo, and the dog will be brought to me. He has not escaped the walls."

"But the other?"

"Is a fool. Behold, I have here the safe conduct given him by the Sultan. Allah deliver us from such safe conducts, for it calls for a life! I shall earn another coin of good-will from my master by sending the Frank's head with this paper to Mustapha."

The *wazir* smiled.

"Then should we have the head washed in rose water, and the beard combed and scented. What has my lord done with the maiden?"

"I have sent for her. The slaves are long in finding the wench. I have a mind to look upon her unveiled."

"Beware of trickery, my lord. The singing girl prays not with the faithful, and I do not think she is a Moslem at heart."

"What matter, O reader of the stars? Hath a singing girl a heart?" Sidi Ahmad yawned and sat up abruptly.

"O lord of lords, king of kings, commander of the faithful!" Lali's voice from the open door of the tower room startled the two men because she saluted Sidi Ahmad as a Sultan. He sprang up, brows furrowed, and snatched the veil from under her eyes.

"Allah! What man told you——"

"Pardon your servant, O Pasha." Lali bent her dark head, the trace of a smile trembling on her lips. "Am I blind not to know who gives orders in Aleppo? Are you not Sidi Ahmad, the Lion of Islam, the far-seeing, the great in heart?"

The narrow eyes of the tall Moslem sparkled as he realized the beauty of the girl. She met his gaze without flinching, her cheeks pale against the dark flood of hair.

"Verily Riwan hath opened the gates of paradise," murmured the pasha, "and let out this damsel for my delight."

But even as he spoke with a satisfied smile, his hand went out and he unclasped the ear-rings that fell to her shoulders. A black pearl was set in each, and Sidi Ahmad felt keener pleasure in the touch of them than in the soft skin of the girl.

"Worth twenty sequins, the pair," he muttered, and stripped a gold bracelet from her arm. "And this almost as much. Why did you linger, at my summons?"

"Lord," spoke up one of the armed slaves who conducted her, "we found this woman fumbling at the door that leads to the tomb below the tower—a thing forbidden by your command."

Sidi Ahmad ceased smiling, and his lips set cruelly.

"Ah, so you have light fingers."

Lali tossed her head, watching the pasha from under lowered lids.

"Favored of Allah, there was talk that you had in the tower a store of Persian silks and rolls of cloth-of-gold, sewn with pearls——"

"What talk is this?" The man's cunning was written in every line of his thin face.

"Nay, what have you seen? You had no key——"

He read confusion in the girl's flushed cheeks and lowered eyes, and nodded thoughtfully. His vanity prompted him to show to Lali greater riches than she had seen at the court, and suspicion impelled him to examine the door at the stairhead. Lali seemed to hang back, and he fancied that she was troubled.

"Come," he said.

"O my lord!" Jal-ud-deen started up from his calculations. "The portent of the stars is dark indeed. I fear——"

"Bah!"

Sidi Ahmad had eyes only for the singing girl as he strode through the door. The guard was changing, and he took eight swordsmen with him into his chambers on the floor below, leaving the same number posted without—for the guard was doubled that night.

The astrologer, having made his salaam, drew back to study his chart again. From the opening in the dome he stared down upon the lighted terraces where cordons of janizaries stood between the throngs of revelers and the palace. Tall minarets rose against the stars like so many spears upraised. A gong sounded the hour from the courtyard below and the heavy tread of soldiery answered it.

Jal-ud-deen reflected that it was well the pasha's anger had fallen upon the girl rather than on himself.

WITH a key taken from his girdle Sidi Ahmad unlocked the door in his sleeping chamber and signed for the men to conduct Lali after him. One with a cresset torch went ahead, down a narrow stair that wound upon itself steeply, being built in a corner of the tower. At the landing opposite the dungeon Sidi Ahmad halted his followers and bade them await his coming or his call.

Lighting an oil lamp that stood in a recess of the wall, he signed for Lali to descend with him. At the foot of the last flight of steps he drew back a heavy curtain, and entered a vaulted chamber where the air was chill and heavy.

Here he set down the lamp upon what had been once an altar of black marble. Drawing Lali with him, he stepped to a row of teak caskets placed upon bales of silk. One of the boxes he opened, disclosing to the gaze of the Armenian a mass of loose pearls.

With the careful fingers of a miser he opened other caskets, showing rubies and sapphires and turquoise—gold ornaments, and rare, carved ivory. At the far end of the wall were heavy bags and Sidi Ahmad explained that they contained coins. He tossed Lali's trinkets into one of the boxes and turned upon her suddenly.

"So you were minded to escape from the tower and go hence to join the *kazak!* Nay, I read in your eyes upon the galley that you loved him, and my memory is long. Is it not true?"

"Verily," said the singing girl, lifting her head, "it is true."

And there was pride in her voice. Sidi Ahmad shrugged, studying her as he might muse over a wayward hunting leopard.

"Eh, then I must buy you. What is your price?"

Lali looked at him and instead of answering, pointed to a black cross set in the white marble of the flooring—

"What gold can buy *that?*"

"By the wrath of Allah!" The Moslem frowned. "Here are strange words for a singing girl. Some bones of the accursed Emir George lie hereabouts and his crypt hath served me well——"

"Have you no fear of the wrath you have stored up against you, by entering here?"

The eyes of the girl traveled ceaselessly over the walls of the tomb, searching for the outline of a door. But nothing was to be seen. Solid rows of bricks of dried mud stood on every hand, gray and crumbling with age. Cracks and gaps between the bricks showed only the dark clay behind. Lali had made the round of the chamber, and she dared not tap the wall to seek for the door, if one existed.

With the guards within call on the stair she would not cry out, in the hope that Demid would hear, if he should be near at hand. If, indeed, the Cossack should appear in the tomb now he would walk into a mare's nest.

Lali's whole thought was to get Sidi Ahmad away before his suspicions were aroused, and yet he continued to watch her as if taking delight in her distress. If, she reasoned swiftly, there had been a door

leading from the tomb into a passage, he would have observed it before now.

Her pulse quickened, at a dull sound close by—a grating, rumbling noise, as if a heavy stone were being rolled about.

Sidi Ahmad heard it, too, and his black eyes darted into the shadows of the tomb. Nothing there. But suspicion like a flame rising in dry tinder seized upon him. His powerful hand caught her slender arm, and his lips drew back from his teeth.

"*Ohai*, I can read your soul, singing girl. Allah fashioned you to be a dove, but you would fly like a falcon. You came to Aleppo, and you have spied into what is hidden. You know my name, and the place of my treasure, and now your eyes search for a way hence. Did Mustapha set you to slay me?"

His free hand sought fruitlessly for a weapon on the girl, who stood passive in his grasp. His face pressed close to hers.

"Were you sent by the Sultan, to do away with Sidi Ahmad? The truth, or you will not sing again! Ah!"

Lali's dark eyes blazed into his.

"I came of my own will, and my thought was to cast you down—who slew my father and hunted my people like beasts."

The words came softly, for his ear alone, yet without pretense of deception. Lali had given utterance to what was in her heart, knowing that her next act would make her defenseless before the rage of the pasha. Her voice, full and clear as a clarion, echoed in the tomb.

"Away Demid! Nine are here with weapons. Away, while there is time!"

The scar on Sidi Ahmad's cheek grew livid and his hand groped for his sword hilt. And then he crouched as if struck. Something thudded against the wall across the chamber. Dust and fragments of brick flew out. The bricks of the wall moved and fell inward under a series of shocks. A black opening appeared where they had been.

Another blow and a large boulder rolled out over the marble floor. The tall figure of an Arab emerged from the hole.

Although he had looked to see something of the kind, Sidi Ahmad felt a twinge of superstitious fear—fear that the dust and bones of the inmate of the tomb had taken human form. But this passed as he made out the dark countenance of the Cossack, blinking in the glare of the lamp.

Demid strode forward out of the cloud of dust from the shattered bricks that had walled up the passage, and stumbled against the massive rock that—fetched from the hillside—he had used to break down the barrier.

"Go back!" cried Lali, beside herself with anxiety. "Swordsmen wait on the——"

Her lips closed on the last word and a moan rose in her throat. Sidi Ahmad had drawn his dagger and thrust it into her side. The steel blade, slender as the tip of a palm frond, passed through the girl's silk vest without a sound, and the Moslem made no effort to draw it out.

Lali's hands flew to the ivory hilt of the dagger, and her eyes opened very wide, fastening on the livid face of the man as if bewildered. His voice shrilled in a shout:

"Ho, Moslems! To me——"

His simitar flashed out in time to parry the first cut of the Cossack who had crossed the tomb in a stride and a leap. The lamp flickered in a draught from the stair and gleamed red on the whirling steel. The swords hung for an instant as if suspended in the air.

Then the Moslem tore loose his blade and hacked at the Cossack, snarling as he felt his weapon turned aside. The scar on his face made it seem as if he were laughing. Demid was smiling, yet his face was dark and the veins on his forehead stood out.

"O pasha—O captain-pasha," he said softly, "you, who would take the life from a girl, remember the sword trick that I taught you! So, it went, and so—then your sword in the air again, and then—this!"

Demid's blade whirled around the Moslem's simitar and passed through his body. Sidi Ahmad coughed and fell heavily, first his knees striking the marble floor, then his head. His followers rushed into the tomb in time to see him stretched out motionless, upon the great cross.

The eight men stared from the body of their master to the strange Arab standing before them sword in hand. Swords slithered from scabbards, but before they could recover from their astonishment the voice of Lali halted them!

"The order is fulfilled, O men of the tower. Lo, I was sent hither by command of Mustapha, the Sultan, upon whom —be peace. And the order was that Sidi Ahmad, who would have betrayed his master, should die."

Kneeling, one hand to her side, she fought for breath.

"Look, in the pasha's girdle—a letter there, asking that his head be sent to the court. Harm not the *aga*, who was sent with me—El Khadr——"

She was silent and the janizaries glanced at one another questioningly. Their eyes fell on the treasure chests, and they fingered their weapons, knowing not what to believe. Lali's wit served her even when her strength was failing, and for the last time she acted a part, hoping to gain respite for Demid.

One of the janizaries called out that they should go for Jal-ud-deen, another that search should be made for the letter, another besought Demid—fruitlessly—to cast down his sword.

Instead the Cossack threw back the hood of his garment, and they saw the black scalp-lock that fell to his shoulder. The pent up anger of many days of brooding blazed in his eyes, and those who beheld him thought that he was stricken with madness. The iron restraint of the long journey to Aleppo fell from him when he saw Sidi Ahmad strike Lali, and the blood was leaping in his veins as he watched his foes.

"Come, dogs," he laughed, "slaves of a slave, come and take me or you will taste the stake and fire. Do you hear? I am the Cossack who rode over you this morning."

Remembrance of how he had dealt with their comrades made the guards hesitate, but they were no cowards. Spreading out, they advanced on him, and he struck the first one down. Then, turning in his tracks, he sprang at those nearest the wall, warding their cuts and slashing back, hewing to the shoulder-bone the slowest of them.

One of the Moslems stumbled over Lali, as they raised a shout of rage, and the point of the Cossack's sword raked him under the eyes before Demid stepped back to the wall in the nearest corner.

The gleam of steel was before his eyes, and in a second he was cut across the arm and chest. Two men were pressing him close when the others heard the thud of footsteps drawing nearer, and the war-cry of the Cossacks.

"*U-ha!*" It was Ayub's bull voice. "Cut, slash, Demid! Where are you?"

The giant *ataman* thrust his head through the hole in the wall and displaced a goodly quantity of bricks in getting his body through. Whipping out his broadsword, he made at the five surviving Moslems, and Michael hurried after him. Other heads appeared, and swords gleamed as the Don men came after their leaders.

FAR below the halls of the Wolf's Ear, the Cossacks worked busily to remove the pick of the treasure of Sidi Ahmad, taking first the jewels, which were thrust into saddle-bags; then the gold ornaments. Ayub, having stationed two warriors on the stair, and satisfied himself that Demid was not seriously hurt, fell to rooting out the best of the carved ivory and the silver fittings. This he did deftly enough, shaking his head with admiration at the hoard Sidi Ahmad had gathered together.

"We must not fail to take off the value of ten thousand sequins," Demid observed.

He was leaning on his sword while Michael bound up the deep cuts about his shoulders.

"Aye, the ransom of Rurik," nodded Ayub, intent on his task. "May I never taste mead again, if we fail. Sidi Ahmad had a tight fist, though little good it did him in the end."

The noise of the fight had been muffled by the depth of the secret stair and the music in the courtyard. Over their heads the Moslems sat at ease, and the astrologer still studied his chart.

But presently a young warrior ran into the vault.

"Father, the brothers at the horses have sent word that people have seen them, and many are crying out——"

"To horse!" barked Demid. "Here with that torch!"

Taking the burning brand, he hurled it among the wooden boxes, and tore down the curtains, tossing them near the flames. Glancing around at the bodies of the slain, he stooped and picked up Lali.

"If you must bear hence the witch," grumbled Ayub, "give her to me. Your wounds will bleed overmuch."

The eyes of the girl opened, and the mask of pain lifted from her drawn face when Demid's arms raised her. Her lips moved.

"To Ibnol Hammamgi—ride to my people!" she whispered. "*Ai-a*, we have kept faith, you and I. We have ridden far

with—a free rein, and have I not—kept faith?"

"Aye," said Demid, pausing and bending his head to catch the almost soundless words.

"Then set me down. I—am not a witch and I do not fear——"

Her hands reached up to touch his face, but closed convulsively on his cloak as a spasm of pain seized her. Demid moved into the passage, ahead of Ayub.

"Nay, little falcon," he said, almost tenderly, "the end of the road is not yet, and surely you will go with me."

THEY were in their saddles, and put the ponies to a gallop before the pasha's guards could close in on them. Through the deserted alleys of the Jews' quarter they passed like the first gust of a storm. From balconies and housetops turbaned heads peered at them, but saw no more than gigantic black forms bending over steeds that spurned up a cloud of dust and were gone.

"They ride like the *djinn* folk!" voices cried from housetop to balcony.

The colored lamps of a pleasure garden touched bearded faces and naked steel, shining through the dust. Here a patrol of mounted mamelukes drew up, in startled haste, in their path. The pistols of the Cossacks flashed and bellowed, and several of the Moslems dropped while their horses reared and plunged, throwing the rest into disorder.

Headed by Ayub who wielded his two-handed sword like the father of all the *djinn*, the Cossacks bunched, and, standing in their stirrups to strike the better, broke through the mamelukes and strung out toward the *Bab el Nasr*, while behind them the Moslems rallied, and the pursuit gathered headway. The shrill roll of kettledrums sounded near at hand and behimd them from the dark tower of the dead Sidi Ahmad blared the trumpets giving the signal to guard the city gates.

A shot barked somewhere near the wall and Ayub began to ply his whip.

"That is the *essaul*. The dogs are biting him and his men. *U-ha!* Brothers, warriors, is your Cossack strength spent—are your horses hobbled? Faster, then!"

Emerging into the cleared space by the gate Michael saw Broad Breeches standing pistol in hand by the iron portal, while one of his men lay stretched on the earth. The other was engaging a trio of Moslems, who drew back as Demid and his men galloped up.

The *essaul* plucked the key from his belt and twisted it in the lock. Then he tugged open the barred gate, thrusting it back, tt allow the riders to pass through withouo slackening pace.

"After us!" Demid called over his shoulder.

The warrior who had been fending off the swords of the Moslems whirled his horse and spurred through the gate. The old sergeant whistled up his pony, but, beholding the mass of pursuers drawing near from the mouths of the alleys, he changed his purpose.

"Once my mother bore me," he muttered, and lifted his hoarse voice in a shout as he perceived that Demid and Michael had reined in to wait for him to come up. "Speed on, *ataman*. Tell the *bandura* players my name——"

With that he closed the gate hastily, turned the key in the lock, and tossed it far into the darkness on the outer side of the gate. Spitting on his hands, he drew his sword and placed his back against the inside of the iron barrier. He was the oldest of the Cossacks, the *essaul*, and many Winters had whitened his hair; his eyes were growing dim and his aged heart glowed with satisfaction because the minstrels would now hear of his name and perhaps put it into their songs. Besides, Michael had given him an order to keep the gate closed.

So he drew his sword and his gray mustache bristled fiercely as the Moslems spurred their horses in on him.

The locked gate and the lost key delayed their pursuit for a precious half-hour while they rode to another opening in the wall and circled back to take up the trail of the Cossacks.

MICHAEL had spent his strength. He stumbled down from his saddle when Demid called a halt at midnight, and another warrior changed the saddle for him to a fresh horse. Vaguely he was aware that Demid still carried the body of the young girl and that the flood of her black hair fell down over the *ataman's* knee like a silken cloak. She had died before the ride began.

He was too tired to feel the ache in his limbs, or the salty dryness of his throat. With his hands gripping the pommel, he let the pony have its head, and, looking back after a while, he puzzled over a red glow that rose above the black line of the wall of Aleppo. The palace of Sidi Ahmad was burning to the ground, but Michael was past caring.

Dry dust of sand was in the air, stinging his eyes; the wind brushed the damp hair from his forehead; the glimmer of the stars through the haze over the desert grew to a flare of torches, and Michael pulled himself awake by a sheer effort of will, to see that the Cossacks had halted and were lighting flares to search for tracks in the sand to show the path they should follow.

"Why do you talk," he muttered drowsily, "when there is a debt to be paid?"

A shaggy head loomed over him and a voice rumbled in his ear.

"The little Frank is past his strength. I will see to it, but he has a true thought. We can not bear the money to our brothers if we talk about the road, with Satan's hunting pack at our heels."

Demid took the lead and they went on at hazard. Once more the saddles creaked, and the cold wind stirred about them. Michael swayed and went into a deep sleep but Ayub's arm steadied him until the streak of dawn on their right hand showed them the first ridge and the valley through which the northern trail ran, full ahead.

Here they breathed the horses and let them roll, until dust began to show on the desert floor behind them and they mounted the freshest beasts, going through the pass and striking out for the river Jihan, two miles in advance of the nearest Moslems.

It was not yet dusk when they reached the river and forced the sweating horses across. Their animals were done by now, but the leading pursuers were on camels that balked at crossing the river, and by the time that the horsemen came up, Demid was able to turn aside from the trail and hide his tracks in a rocky ravine. Safe for a few hours, they walked their horses, sleeping in the saddles.

Before dawn they dismounted to eat a little and drink from the water-bags they had filled at the river. With the first light Demid sent men to the nearest heights to try to place the detachments of janizaries that must be well up with them by now.

After ascertaining their position and that of the nearest pursuers they set out, keeping to the clay gullies, for they were in broken country here, close to the foothills.

Michael found that one of his saddle-bags was filled with heavy bits of gold. He took some up in his hand, wondering whether the treasure would serve them in the end. But Demid would not hear of abandoning it.

Late that afternoon they entered the first fringe of timber, on the higher slopes of the mountains, and over their heads loomed the white peaks of the Caucasus. It was here that a youth in sheep-skins came leaping down toward them, crying eagerly that Ibnol Hammamgi was awaiting them in the nearest pass with fresh horses, and that fighting was in progress between the Turks and the Sivas tribe that had waited here to cover their retreat if they came back.

Michael, in fact, soon heard the flicker of arrows in the brush and the neighing of horses. Not until then had he known how close the pursuit had drawn about them. But Demid greeted the chief of the mountain folk without comment and bade him draw his men back with them, for the Turks were in force at their rear.

"I have brought back Lali, daughter of Macari," he added, "do you bear her to the patriarch, that he may perform the rites due to the child of a chieftain."

XIII

Where the road ends the warriors dismount, and when all have come up they talk together of the paths each one has followed; but of those who set out in the beginning upon the road, not all have come to the end. Aye, many have followed another path, and of these the warriors talk, saying over the names of those who will not take to saddle again.

THE sun grew warmer on the Cossack steppe, and the snow dwindled to gray patches; then grass came and the whole steppe was like a swamp, over which no army could move. Spring passed, and crops were sown and still no Moslem banners were seen crossing the frontier.

When the wheat and oats were ripening, minstrels and Gipsies drifted in to the camps of the Zaporoghian Cossacks, where a nucleus of warriors were guarding the frontier. These wanderers from the sea brought word of Demid.

They told how the tower of Sidi Ahmad had been fired, and how the Don Cossacks, or what remained of them, had reached the Armenian mountains and had been conducted by the shrewd hillmen to the east, along hidden valley-trails used by the Armenians. Gipsies told, furthermore, that the Cossacks had been seen off Trebizond, coasting by the shore in two open boats, and that a rabble of Greeks, Syrians and what-not had put out from that port to intercept them, hearing that they had gold.

After that no word came, of Demid and his followers, and the Cossacks of the Siech shook their heads mournfully, and settled down to their watch on the Dnieper. Yet still the Turks hung back from the expected invasion.

There was a reason for this. The burning of the tower of Aleppo and the loss of the treasure had spread suspicion throughout the Turks of Asia Minor. Sidi Ahmad no longer ruled their counsels; some whispered that the Sultan had slain the pasha. The mamelukes, who had not been paid, marched back to Egypt and took their reward in plunder from the cities in their path. Always intriguing, the Shah of Persia held back his forces to use for his own advantage.

Meanwhile Jal-ud-deen met the fate that so long he had feared—an assassin from the court ended his life, and Aleppo,fighting and thieving again quite naturally, the janizaries banded against the townspeople and the Arabs, well content, against both. So Mustapha mustered his army slowly in Europe, hoping for word of the treasure of Sidi Ahmad that had vanished from the ken of men.

It was when the crops were being gathered in on the Cossack steppe, and the favorite time for a Moslem invasion was at hand, that fresh tidings came to the Siech from the imperial city. A new priest took up his abode in the log church of the Siech and gave forth a word that was repeated from the Dnieper to the Don, as far as the forests of the north.

Rurik, the chief of all the Cossacks, was slain.

He had been killed by a quarrelsome Moslem guard, in the last Winter, and the Sultan had kept the news a secret, believing that he could trick the Cossacks out of the ransom money. But Rurik, the greatest of all *koshevois*, captain of the falcon ship and father of the Zaporoghian brotherhood, had been cut down with a simitar before Demid was fairly on his long journey.

The word passed over the steppe like a grass fire, driven by a high wind. Riders bore it to the far districts of the steppe, and warriors emerged from their villages—veterans of other wars took to horse before sunset and youths came from the horse herds to join them. Bands of black-capped riders began to move south over the steppe, and the *balalaikas* sounded in the taverns where the men of the lower country were drinking, and talking over their wrongs.

Ten thousand Cossacks, aroused by the death of Rurik, crowded into the Siech and called for a council to be held. The drum was beaten and the warriors thronged from the barracks to the central square where their colonels stood with the priest. The *rada*—the council of the brotherhood—had not assembled, by the empty hut of the *koshevoi*, when a message came from the patrol on the river that a new band of Cossacks were swimming their horses across to the island camp.

And these newcomers were from the Tatar side of the river.

"It is that unbridled ——, Demid, come home to roost at last," said the *essaul* of the patrol. "Have you food, noble sirs, for the wanderers? Have you garments? If they come from the east they must be lean and tattered."

"They have passed over a long road," responded one of the colonels. "We will have food, for their eating. Garments we lack."

In fact the Siech was bare of aught but a sprinkling of horses and the weapons each man brought. Nor did he resent the rough words of the *essaul*, for, until the Siech was at war, there was no rank among the brotherhood.

IT WAS quite a while before the men on the outskirts of the assembly sighted the new arrivals. (It turned out afterward that Ayub had halted the band to dress up a bit.)

First came the young warrior who had once asked where the sea was. Now he rode in the *essaul's* position, one hand on hip, his hat tilted at a rakish angle. His old boots had been discarded for a new pair of red morocco, with blue heels. His leather belt was replaced by a green velvet scarf,

and in it, carefully displayed, was a long Turkish pistol with gold-inlaid hilt.

Four out of the Don men, decked out in all the finery they could lay hand on, trotted in line after the young sergeant, showing off the steps of the blooded Kabarda mounts. When the staring Zaporoghians pressed too close they thrust out with their stirrups, and bade the onlookers yield place to the *Donskoi* who had been on a visit to Aleppo.

"Eh, they are tricked out like pashas, the dogs!" muttered the colonel who had spoken of garments.

Four more of the riders escorted a bullock cart laden with heavy leather sacks. But ten thousand pairs of eyes passed over the cart to focus with astonished admiration on Ayub.

The giant *ataman* had robed himself that morning for the Siech. His *kalpack* was white ermine, bordered with gold braid; a purple cloak of damask embroidered with peacock-feathers hung from his broad shoulders; instead of the long Cassack coat he had on a Turkish robe of honor, of the sheerest silvered cloth, studded with pearls. Diamonds gleamed from the armlets that held in place his wide sleeves.

"His trousers!" cried a stranger to the Siech. "Only look at his pantaloons!"

Ayub stroked his mustache, delighted with the attention given him. Instead of the usual Cossack attire, he wore a pair of silk bag-trousers, as wide as sails, and the purest yellow in hue.

Behind the cart Demid and Michael rode into the ring of the *rada* almost unnoticed. Only eleven had come back, of the thirty-four that had set out. The new priest saluted Ayub gravely, taking him for the leader of the band.

"You have come from a hard road, my son—surely the *bandura* players and the minstrels will sing of your deeds this night."

He did not know the man he addressed.

"Why do you talk to me of minstrels, *batko?* As the saints are dear to me, I have as good a tongue as their's, and I do not need any fiddles or lutes to give it tone. Come, brothers, a cup of vodka, now—I tasted the pasha's sherbet in Aleppo, but he had no vodka."

Some one gave him a cup and he poured it down his throat deftly.

"Not bad!"

He rose in his stirrups and lifted his voice.

"Noble sirs, it is not modest in a man to relate all his deeds, so I will only touch on a few. When you wish to know how to capture the Sultan's navy, I can put a word or two in your ears, where at present there are only fleas. And as for capturing such cities as Aleppo with walls as high as the tallest pines—why I and Demid and the little cockerel of a Frank do not bother our heads about such trifles any more."

The throng pressed nearer and Ayub's old comrades began to grin and nudge each other.

"I could tell you how it feels to fight night vampires and ghosts in a Turkish burial ground, or to change the heart of a witch——"

"Enough!" broke in Demid coldly.

"—or to row in an open skiff across the Black Sea, when the waves were like the slopes of the Caucasus; but you, sir brothers, only want to scratch the backs of your heads that itch from too much lying down."

"May the dogs bite you!" howled an angry warrior. "How did you get away from the Greeks, off Trebizond?"

"How did we do that? Easily—it was nothing at all. When dusk fell the little Frank bade us light two-score slow matches that we still had with us for the arquebuses. As I live, we had no fire-locks any more, but the Greeks, counted the burning matches and sheered off, thinking we were in force. After that we landed, and it is the truth that we passed under the mountain where the blessed ark landed when God flooded the world.* Aye, we climbed mountains—such mountains! The fiend himself could not have flown over them. Then we mauled the Tatars a bit on their steppe and cut down a hundred or so, because we wanted their horses. But as to that, every one in the world knows except you, dog brothers, who are swimming in fat because you have eaten in kitchens so long. I will say only that I—and Demid and Ser Mikhail—have here a million sequins as ransom for the *koshevoi* Rurik."

"Rurik is no longer *koshevoi*," observed one of the Cossacks.

"How, no longer?"

"Because the Turks have cut his head open and sliced his heart and salted him down, so that he is no longer alive."

* Probably Ayub stretched matters here, but Ararat is visible from a long distance to the north.

Ayub's brown face became grim and Demid spurred up to the speaker.

"When did that happen?" he asked.

"Last Candlemas, *ataman*."

"And you stand here, like midwives at a borning!"

The eyes of the young warrior flashed around the circle of lifted faces, and he raised his clenched hand over his head. Seven months of achievement in spite of nerve-trying obstacles—his whole journey into Islam had been wasted.

The nearest Cossacks hung their heads, and avoided his gaze.

"The forehead to you, *ataman*," spoke up the colonel who had greeted Demid. "We are not cowards that you should use words like a whip, and we lacked powder, cannon and horseflesh. If the Turks had come up at us we would have pounded them, but we had no leader to go against them."

"Rurik dead!"

Demid turned to Ayub, who for once was speechless. Then he spoke to Michael, evenly:

"This treasure, then, is ours. Your share is a large one, and I will put it aside——"

"Not so," answered the cavalier promptly. "It was a rare voyage—and my share of Sidi Ahmad's loot goes with yours."

"And you, Michael?"

"I shall venture with you henceforth."

"Eh, the wild goose has chosen its flock." Demid's white teeth flashed in a smile. "Good."

Once more he surveyed the watching brotherhood, who were ill at ease.

"Now, noble sirs—" he leaned over to jerk a bag from the cart and toss it to the priest—"here is a new church for the *batko*, aye and new images of gold and silver."

Pulling out the other sacks he slashed them open with his sword, releasing upon the ground a flood of shining gold, amber and ivory—and a torrent of the finest jewels.

"It is not fitting for one Cossack to have more than his brothers. So set your hands in this trash and drink it up, or lay it out in garments or horses, just as you will. Guzzle and gorge and then go back to hug your wives and tend your cattle."

Taking up his reins he turned away, his face dark with disappointment.

For a while the elders of the council were angry, then they scratched their heads, and began to pull at their mustaches moodily. A buzz of talk drifted in from the groups of the warriors, and yet no man put hand to the wealth that lay on the earth.

"He spoke well. That's a fact."

"Aye, he has a horned soul in him. There is no milk in his blood. Did you hear him call the officers old women?"

"Well, his sword will back up his words, right enough. No getting around that——"

"He flew down on Aleppo——"

"But we are not old women. Let us buy powder and bullets and carriage guns and pound the Turk."

The murmur grew to a shout and the colonels asked what the will of the assembly was.

"Our will is that Demid should be *koshevoi*—chief of all the Cossacks!"

"Aye," roared Ayub, who had lingered to hear what was to follow, "that was well said. He was Rurik's chum."

The head men put their heads together, and admitted that Demid had shown wisdom; he had outwitted the Turks, and only the —— was cleverer than the Turks.

"Demid!" howled the throng of warriors. "Give him the baton, you ox-tails, or we will pound you!"

The colonels held up their hands and gave their assent and a voice somewhere took up a song:

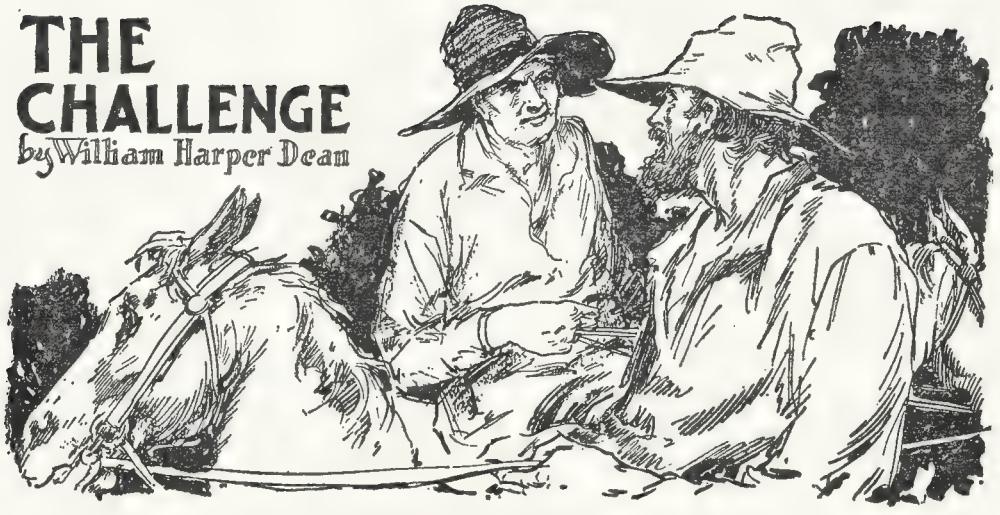
"Glorious fame will arise,
Among the Cossacks,
Among the heroes,
Till the end of time."

AND that Winter when the *bandura* players sat by the fireside in the cottages on the steppe, they had a new song. Bending their aged limbs toward the blaze and nodding their lean heads, they told how Demid the Falcon, rallied the strength of the Cossacks along the border and went against the Sultan.

They sang, these *baudura* players, who were blind minstrels, of the deeds they had not seen, of a slender Frank who was made colonel of a regiment, and of the storm that was brewed by the giant Ayub who rode his horse within sight of the imperial city. They told how the Sultan tore his beard, and the streets of Islam ran red until all the world knew how the Cossacks had come to a reckoning with the Turks for the death of Rurik.

THE CHALLENGE

by William Harper Dean



Author of "Zukoff Fits a Key" and "Breed of the Brush."

JIM McBRYDE rode scowling through his cotton fields, though they were white with pendant wide-open locks—a yield that would have warmed the cockles of his heart in other years but which was now robbed of its glamor. For in Jim's philosophy of production a crop was a crop only when baled and stored. And this snow-white bounty was far, very far from achievement of that goal.

The drought had come just when needed. One fairly heard the crackling of locks unfolding to free the splendid staple as searing sun and parching winds dried out the last vestige of sap and fructified a season's toil. The same parching heat which set the staple free turned its blighting breath upon the hosts, which since early Spring had worked with diabolical cunning to blast the crop and, fattening upon the destruction, to withdraw in gorged contentment to await another season's revels. Beneath the white-plumed cotton stalks lay the mummified weevils in countless thousands.

To the uninformed, the sight of those fields and sun-slain weevils would have symbolized success. The crop had been made, its successor would escape the early Spring offensive of those millions of weevils cut off in the very midst of their final orgy. But to Jim McBryde the sight of it all brought a heavy scowl.

There was cause in plenty for his ill humor. Night after night the fields had been filled with sound as shouting blacks, waving lanterns, hurling clods, sometimes running for their very lives, met the droves of hollow-eyed, hunger-maddened steers that crossed the dried river bed from their timbered range on the far shore and fought to fill their constricted stomachs with the scattered remnant of leaves clinging to the cotton stalks. The ruin that lay in their bellowing wake made Jim set his jaw. Stalks were trampled, the snowy staple damaged beyond hope of recovery. What the sun had wrought for Jim McBryde's crop, the steers were counterblasting.

Nor was that all. Jim reined in and swept the fields with appraising eyes. There should have been the sight of every tenant, every laborer, every woman and child existing by grace of Jim's employment, hard at work gathering that crop. But the fields were under-manned. The labor was demoralized. And the same agency which had contrived the nightly spoliation of his crop by hungered irresponsible beasts, deliberately was jeopardizing the harvest of what escaped the steers by rendering utterly impotent the human factors upon whom the harvest must depend.

Saddler, Jim's overseer, came riding across the cotton to where Jim sat viewing the dilemma. A runt of a man, gray-haired and sun-crisped to a brown, he reined up and looked inquiringly at McBryde, a giant by comparison, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired.

"Where's the rest of the labor?" said Jim.

Saddler snorted.

"Where! You ask that! Go take a look around the quarters. You'll see. You know as well as I do."

"They didn't cross the river to get it? You know that?"

"What's the matter with you this mornin'?" was the petulant answer. "When has a man with black skin crossed that river, high water or low? When's one put his foot in that county?"

"Then you know Fisher's gang came over here with it—again?"

"You still wonderin' about that? Course they came. I can't stop 'em —— knows. Up half th' night fightin' back Fisher's steers—what time's a man got for watchin' th' whole plantation for that gang? You tell me, Jim. An' I tell you this: They're goin' to keep comin' as long as it's a loose dollar in th' quarters. An' tell you somethin' else ag'in. If this keeps up, we might as well let th' weevil take the next crop an' quit. Starvin' cattle, bootlaig licker an' a dry river bed don't spell crop. You know it!"

Jim's eyes narrowed.

"Go on and do the best you can, Saddler. I'm goin' to Grimsby court-house."

Saddler laughed.

"For a warrant? You might as well go over an' ask 'em to give you th' county. They'd do it a heap quicker. Better save yourself th' ride."

"Go on," said Jim, twitching his lines. "We'll see."

HE RODE to the bank of the expiring Brazos that twisted a serpentine line between deep-timbered Grimsby and the county of Richland. Down the steep, sun-baked slope the mount picked his way, then stepped briskly over the arid river bed marked with countless footprints of the starving steers which nightly came out of that deep-shadowed timber to lay waste his fields.

A mere brooklet coursed down the center of the bed of a river which more than once had thundered here and flung its tawny arms high over the bank of Jim McBryde's fertile acres. Here and there stood a pathetically gaunt steer filling with the tepid water, rolling anguished eyes at Jim, then at the cotton beyond. The man who rode felt no hate for these; for the man who owned them he carried an unsettled score.

He ascended the far bank and entered the mighty timberland. Underfoot the last vestige of growth had been obliterated by the ranging cattle. Overhead hung the prodigious festoons of Spanish moss—like a silvery cataract that all but shut out the light of the sun. Yet not a single crinkly tendril of the parasite reached below the line to which by its most frantic endeavor a steer might lift its hungering mouth. It was as though some wielder of a gigantic shears had been through the woodland and clipped the low-straggling strands of moss on a line established with mathematical accuracy.

Here and there stood a group of steers about the deadened limbs of a fallen monarch pin-oak. They stood there because once a man had felled that tree to bring its burden of silvery moss within range of hungry mouths. Long, long ago the last tendril had been devoured. And now they had come back, instinctively, if hopelessly, to where they once had stilled their hunger pangs with the watery parasite which at best could preserve life with its miserable pittance of nourishment.

To Jim McBryde this whole principle of letting cattle roam a woodland to shift for themselves was wrong; it was brutal, primitive. And now as he dwelt upon the direct injury this gross mismanagement was doing to him, his slow anger burst into flame. He'd bring Joe Fisher to account for this—and for the other thing.

He rode into Grimsby village, a single-street settlement in a thinly populated county. A quiet little spot drowsing in the heat of the epochal drought. Not a being was in sight; the *clop-clop* of his horse's feet in the dusty road sounded very loud. Grimsby seemed at peace with all the world. But Jim McBryde was not deceived. He knew the village as he knew the county, which these six months had lived under marshal law. Hardly a house in the quiet settlement through which he road that had not heard the whine or felt the *thwack!* of rifle bullets. An election bitterly contested, charges of fraud, and in a flash uprising factions with steady eyes, tight jaws and fingers toying with hair triggers.

That was six months ago—the red outbreak of passion. Today all Grimsby rode and walked and slept under martial law,

suspicious, nervous. Man looked askance at man as they passed on the highroads, felt their shoulder blades twitch when back was turned to back. Into the court-house of Grimsby County stalked Jim McBryde.

The sheriff's door was open. That man, a veritable sliver of bronzed sinew, sat dozing in his chair, spur-booted feet propped in the window-sill. He opened his eyes.

"Howdy, Jim."

"Hello, Boyd.

McBryde squeezed his bulk into a chair beside the sheriff's.

"Look here, Joe Fisher's steers are ruining my crop. His bootleggers are ruining my labor. I want some service from this outfit."

Boyd tore off a chew from his plug and crammed it into his cheek.

"I figgered they'd be doin' jest that thing, Jim."

"You didn't have to figure," said Jim levelly. "You knew it. This is the third time I've told you. Now, I want that warrant."

Boyd shifted the quid.

"Jim, you know this here's a no-fence county. Ain't a law to touch his case."

"Well, Fisher's got a still in that pin-oak timber. You know it, so does everybody else. I've told you just where it is. There's plenty of law to touch that, isn't there?"

Boyd was studying his boot toes.

"Jim, be sensible. You know what a mess we're in over here. Six months of martial law. Just let anybody serve a warrant on Joe or any of his crowd an' ——'d break loose tomorrow. You know it. An' we don't want to go through *that* again."

Jim got up. "Where's th' rest of the crowd—judge and so on?"

"Won't be here till next court day. I'm holdin' down things. An' I'm sittin' tight, you hear me!"

Emphatically he shook his head.

"There's goin' to be peace in Grimsby long as Mister Boyd's in charge o' things. That's straight, Jim."

Jim pointed his finger at the man. "I'm not comin' over here any more. If I get hold of Joe Fisher, he's goin' to talk matters over with th' sheriff of *my* county, understand?"

Boyd drew in a deep breath and looked at Jim gratefully.

"That's th' talk, Jim. I'll never raise my hand to that. You take it up with Joe an' "—he raised his voice—"an' keep me out o' it!"

Jim rode away, through the village, across the prairie fields of sun-scorched grass, deep into the pin-oak timber. He rode with bent head, thinking, thinking. It was up to him and he meant to see it through. The trail was narrow, deep-shadowed by the moss-hung limbs. And silent as death. Suddenly Jim looked up, reined in. The man of whom he had been thinking was riding as though to meet him.

Jim sat watching the great black-bearded bulk of Joe Fisher sway rhythmically in the saddle to the accompanying *cash-cash-cash* of sun-dried leather. A man to match his own heroic mould, a man of great potentialities misdirected. He reined up.

"Howdy, Jim."

Jim nodded.

"I've been over to Grimsby. I tried to get your steers an' bootleggers stopped regular. They're a bunch of yellow livers over there."

Joe Fisher looked Jim McBryde up and down through black sparks shining behind the tangle of eyebrows.

"Yellow livers, you say. That's strong talk. What's that about my steers?"

"*An'* bootleggers," supplemented Jim coldly. "The steers are ruinin' my crop; your bootleggers are ruinin' my labor. I've sent word to you about it—twice. Keep 'em both off my land, Fisher."

"Expect me to fence Grimsby County line?"

"No. Feed those cattle. That will keep 'em where they belong. Any half-decent man would do it."

Fisher raised himself in his saddle while the leather creaked and groaned.

"Lookin' for trouble?"

"I'll tell you this," said Jim. "I've warned you three times. If those bootleggers of yours or those steers of yours cross my line once more, *you're* goin' to make th' acquaintance of a sheriff an' a judge that you can't bully."

Fisher broke into roaring laughter.

"Send him over, Jim. You know whar to find me."

"Yes, I know," nodded Jim. "But I won't send anybody. I'll come for you myself. Have you got that straight?"

Fisher looked Jim up and down.

"They tell me you're a pretty good man

with your fists. That what you drivin' at?"

"That's all I'll bring with me."

Fisher shook his great head slowly.

"That's talk. Come any time, Jim. That's a bargain. Jes' me an' you—man to man? You come any time, Jim."

He touched his mount with a spur and brushed past on a canter.

Jim McBryde rode on, grimly silent. He had delivered a two-fisted ultimatum. And Fisher had replied with the bellow of a man supreme in the confidence of his own physical might.

SADDLER built fires all along the bank.

"That'll help," he said to Jim, as the latter rode down the line of them. "It'll take about half as many hands to keep them steers out now. Dunno why I didn't think of it in th' first place. An' I got to save th' hands, Jim. That gin's goin' to start in th' mornin'. What did you do over'n Grimsby?"

"Nothin'," said Jim. "Work it out any way you please."

LATE that night Saddler was kicking and beating madly on Jim's door. And as Jim rolled out of bed, the yellow glare of something afire was flashing across his room.

"—— to pay!" panted Saddler. "Don't go out to see. You can't do nothin'. It's th' gin-house."

Jim bit his lip.

"Who fired it?"

"Who? You ask me that! Who set up smokin' an' wranglin' in a gin-house unless it's a lot o' half-crazy cotton-pickers full o' bootlaig? Don't blame them, Jim. Fisher's th' one."

McBryde was getting into his clothes.

"I don't. Get my horse. Send somebody for our sheriff an' tell him to wait here till I get back."

"What—what you doin', Jim?"

"You heard me, didn't you? Horse an' sheriff. You got the hands keepin' sparks from that gin-house away from the quarters? That's right. Go on, now."

AN HOUR later Jim McBryde crept carefully through inky blackness of the pin-oak timber. At the very edge of it he had left his horse.

He might have gone boldly, incautiously to his objective. But he could not trust the man he had pledged himself to bring away this night. Fisher would be expecting him, that he was certain of. But who else would be lying in the viscid blackness, eager and ready to deal a blow for the man? Fisher had henchmen; he had enriched them through his nefarious trade. If Fisher won the impending struggle, they would never be seen. If he lost——

Suddenly McBryde stiffened. The light he had been approaching was close at hand. In tremendous silhouette stood Fisher, listening, turning quickly as though fearing to be caught unawares.

"Oh, Fisher!" McBryde called clearly.

Fisher wheeled, tense, half-crouching.

"Keep your men back, Fisher. This is Jim McBryde. I've got just as many behind me as you have. I've come for fair play. Am I goin' to get it?"

Fisher barked out:

"Show yourself an' keep your hands up. An' tell your men it's fair play long's you play fair. Don't wait too long. My men is nervous, Jim."

McBryde strode into the tiny clearing that reeked of souring mash. The still he knew was just beyond.

He threw off his hat.

"I told you today I was comin' for you if your men crossed my line. They've done it. You're goin' back with me, Fisher."

With a sound that was like a growl of savage glee, great Fisher lunged his bulk with the quickness of a flash. McBryde, off guard, went down from the impact of a catapulting shoulder and a sledge of a fist that seemed to explode against his forehead. His ears rang, the light of the lantern danced crazily. With a gulp he struggled to his feet in time to meet the next wild surge of brutish might.

He had known Fisher's reputation as a fighter. Never until now had he realized the man's herculean aggressiveness. He knew he was in for it. He set his teeth, braced himself and let Fisher charge again.

Here he came, arms like pistons driven, growling, rumbling in his throat, head down like a battering-ram. It was the very thing McBryde hoped for. He was braced, left foot forward. A mighty swing and he drove with every ounce of his power, straight for the bearded jaw. The impact all but made him cry out with pain. He

thought he had broken his hand. Down went Fisher with a crash.

McBryde thought—

"I've killed him."

The sight of the man rebounding to his feet brought a scowl to McBryde's face. He couldn't hit any harder than that last blow. If the man could take such punishment as that! Fisher came again. McBryde swung. With a tremendous thump the blow landed full in the giant's chest. Yet on he came. McBryde threw up his guard. Fisher's right broke through it and found—his forehead again. The blow turned him dizzy. And Fisher was driving to his body while he fought for steadiness.

"Finish him, Joe!" yelled a voice.

It stabbed McBryde into quickened percipience. He was alone, fighting now for his life. Behind Fisher lay men who would stick at nothing, itching for a pot-shot at the man who had dared challenge their lawlessness.

"Stay back, men!" yelled McBryde. "Fair fight! Don't move unless they do!"

Then he went in to Fisher. It was as though the last staggering blow had started a new mechanism in his brain. It was saying:

"It's Fisher's fight if he fights his way! It's Fisher's fight if he fights his way!"

McBryde charged. Fisher's way was to keep the initiative. He must put him on the defensive or be killed.

Straight at the bearded jaw he swung. It landed and Fisher's head flew back. He grunted and tried to charge through. McBryde drove his left to the jaw with a fearful crack. Yet Fisher broke through. Jim's body caught the impact and the breath flew from it and was caught again with a heave that was like a great furious sob.

Charge again! Fisher threw up both hands and broke the assault, swung back for the counterblow. But on the flash of an instant as that guard went down, Jim's right went in. Fisher crashed to the ground, bounded up and before he could lunge, McBryde had found the hairy chin. The man went down again, cursing, was up in a flash. In the name of Heaven would nothing hurt him?

Jim McBryde, panting, lunging, grappling, swinging, fought with the might of desperation. Let Fisher punish him, he would take it. Not another blow would he waste until the time was ripe. He must end this soon, or it would be done for him. He could not stand such terrific punishment as this man had taken. He could not much longer stand what Fisher was inflicting. The man was tireless, indestructible, overwhelming!

His shirt was half torn from his battered torso, his head still ringing from those blows between his eyes. Yet he waited, taking this and that from Fisher's flying fists, crowding in, closer, closer, grimly. Fisher seemed to understand, for he was growling as he fought, his little sparks of eyes fixed upon McBryde's cool blue ones. It was as though he was endeavoring to read what was working in McBryde's towsled, flaxen head.

The moment came. At close quarters Fisher had driven furiously to McBryde's ribs and followed with a swing of his left. Jim gritted his teeth and took—both. For even in the agonized instant as the blows went home, he knew that the moment was what he had fought for, sacrificed for. The mark was there, to a fraction of an inch within range for the maximum blow.

The mark was unprotected. And with a sweep and swing of arm and body, Jim McBryde struck it. Fisher's head flew back. He toppled over and fell like a log. Lay there limp and breathing with the sound of a great bellows. McBryde braced himself against a tree and dizzily saw his work was done.

A stir in the underbrush roused him, steadied him. Fisher's henchmen were waiting to know. And there stood McBryde in the lantern light a fair target. To win this battle and then go down from a shot in the dark! What a hair-brained fool he had been to come alone! His bluff wouldn't last; already the sound of stirring beyond the rim of light was a challenge.

Fisher lay there, licked! Outside lay men who were not licked, men who would stick at nothing. He heard their very whispering. It sent a chill down his spine. He turned and spoke into the darkness.

"Men, keep back. But if Fisher's crowd starts anything——"

He broke off. The utter emptiness of it sickened him. That bluff was going to be called. He knew it. He was trapped. It might happen any moment now. A red spurt of flame from the blackness, eager hands dragging at Fisher's inert bulk. No answering shot from behind McBryde.

What a fool to come like this! What a fool!

He started, steel-taut in every fiber. Just beyond the light a splintering crackling sound, a moment of fearful silence and then the thundering plunge of a giant limb to earth. A limb, that was all. But what a limb! The echo of its crashing fall echoed like the roll of an explosion.

And then, with chills racing up and down through his veins, Jim McBryde heard the swift running of many feet. Coming—his way! Saddler! Loyal old Saddler had come in the nick of time, bringing men to blot out that ugly menace there beyond the rim of light—men who would fight!

"Come on boys, come on!"

Even as he shouted, Jim McBryde sprang at the lantern, dashed it to the ground and smothered all things in a blanket of black. Instantly he heard the stumbling rush of bodies about. There was a flash, a red one. And a hot humming fanned his cheek. Then headlong plunging through the timber. Fisher's henchmen were running for their lives.

"Saddler! This way! Come on, boys!"

Something knocked him down and went over and beyond him. The night became a black chaos of rushing bodies, hot-breathed snorts. Jim McBryde felt himself falling asleep.

IT WAS broad daylight when he awoke. He was lying on the ground, gazing up through the sun-flecked festoons of silvery moss. And Saddler was bathing his head with water, and the sound of many voices was in his ears. He sat up and looked stupidly about him. There opposite him, his back against a tree, sat great Fisher. His wrists were crossed in the cold clutch of handcuffs. And in McBryde's nostrils was the stifling odor of alcohol.

"Well, thank th' Lord you're up!" It was Saddler. "Musta been some fight. Found you both dead to th' world. Who shot?"

"One of Fisher's men," said McBryde, with effort remembering. "You heard it? They were waiting to make up their minds—about me. If a limb hadn't fallen an' brought those starvin' steers runnin' for its moss——"

"What you talkin' about?" demanded Saddler. "We haven't been here long. Just finished breakin' up th' still. Th' sheriff an' me got a crowd when you didn't show up an'——"

"I know," said Jim, getting weakly to his feet. "I know. I bluffed 'em a while about my havin' a crowd behind me. Then that limb fell. Th' steers heard it an' came runnin' to get th' moss. First I thought it was you. Then one of 'em knocked me down an' I saw what was up. But Fisher's crowd—they thought—well, they thought just right for me."

He turned and surveyed the destruction as Saddler put his hand on his arm.

"Jim," he was saying, "I told you I brought th' sheriff—our sheriff. He says if *we'll* bring Fisher across th' river of our own free will, he'll see that you won't have any more trouble. I've already busted up his outfit of my own free will, an' if he can walk I'll finish it up."

He approached the glowering, shackeled man.

"Come on, Mr. Fisher. Our county court-house is still doin' business. They're expectin' you over there. Seems like Grimsby County's willin' Jim McBryde handles your case. So I guess everybody's goin' to be satisfied."

Plants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Point of View

IT'S all in the point of view, isn't it?

Last week one morning, at nine A.M., I jumped into my car and drove with never a stop save for gas or oil until six-thirty in the evening, at thirty miles an hour all the time. When I reached my destination a good woman said:

"But your dinner? Why, you've had no dinner. Oh, isn't that dreadful?"

I laughed saying:

"On my way I picked up a tramp who hadn't eaten since yesterday morning. What's *one* meal to miss? Lots of good people miss two or three, one after another, and nobody knows or cares."

Life's a peculiar fiddle-tune, isn't it?

"*Point of View*," *Copyright, 1923, by Bill Adams.*

A Complete Novelette

FLATFOOT STRATEGY

by Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "Over the Hump," "Snootful, Gullets and Hawkeye," etc.

IT BEGAN about ten o'clock one morning, coming back from Marseilles, France. We had just joined the battleship fleet off the Azores Islands, where we had parted to scatter over the European coast, sight-seeing, a month before.

"Snootful" Bennet had the forenoon signal watch, and stood out on the starboard bridge-wing, pointing his telescope at the flag-ship's bridge. At his elbow stood little "Dixie" Witherby, Snootful's recorder, a pad of signal-blanks in hand, a pencil behind his ear. A little inboard, along the flag-board, were Snootful's three bunting-tossers—"Hienie" Schmidt, "Scotty" Howie and "Frenchy" Pardue—all very much on their toes, ready to bend on and shoot up a hoist the instant their boss, Snootful, sighted it going over the flag-ship's rail, and called it out. For there was nothing that gang would rather do than beat the flag-ship to the yard-arm with a flag hoist.

I stood in the center of the bridge, within the mast, looking wise and feeling very important. For I was temporarily acting as chief, you see—our former chief having gone to the hospital ship at Marseilles.

The tension was suddenly broken by the voice of Snoots.

"Answerin' pennant, half-way up!" he barked. "Stand by to write, Dixie!"

This meant that the flag-ship was about to send us a message by semaphore. So I eased out on the wing. Snootful called it out and Dixie wrote it.

Your radiogram 21206. How many cases have you on board?

No signature meant that it came from the fleet admiral—the "Big Noise."

"Two blocks!" Snoots sang out—meaning, run the answering-pennant all the way up to the yard-arm, this being the way we acknowledged receipt of a message. "Haul down! Awright, Dixie, chase that over to the orficer o' the deck."

Snoots then turned to me and said—

"What do yuh make o' that, Breeze?"

"How many cases—cases—" I was guessing hard—"Cases of what, I wonder."

His broad, freckled face spread out in a grin that was hideous. He spat over the rail and replied—

"Looks to me like the admiral's gullet is a little husky, an' he figgers our old man might have a little stock o' that dollar-a-quart champagne from Marseilles."

He stuck out his tongue and licked first one ear, then the other. Then running his big, gnarled fingers through his thick red hair, he went on—

"—— of a thing fer the Big Noise to be doin', ain't it—comin' right out flat-footed an' lettin' half the fleet know he's got hot coppers."

Little Dixie returned, having delivered the message.

"Say, fellahs," he drawled tiredly, "what do y'all reckon that message could mean? Do you s'pose the adm'al could be askin' ou' captain how many cases of wine has he

got? An adm'al ought to have betteh sense 'n that."

"No man's got sense when he's got hot coppers!" Snoots asserted flatly.

We were still discussing that message five minutes later when the captain's orderly, a marine, came out on the bridge-wing and handed me the reply. It said:

Thirty-nine. Seven new ones this morning.

After reading it aloud I handed it to Scotty to semaphore to the flag-ship.

"Seven new ones, eh?" grinned Snoots. "The old man must be makin' it back there in his cabin."

"He cain't teach me anything about makin' cawn hoo-whisky," declared Dixie. "Down in Kentucky we make that stuff, what I mean."

"My father had twenty-six years in a brewery," stated Hienie Schmidt. "We always had home-made beer in our house."

Frenchy Pardue's black eyes shot fire. "When you want real wine you have to come to us frogs!" he spat forth.

Not to be left out in the cold was Scotty, up on the rail sending the message.

"What's the best whisky made?" he growled down at us. "Scotch, I'll say!"

Then Snoots, boss of the watch, silenced them all.

"Yuh'se can all gas off about makin' it, an' all that. But I'll drink the whole gang o' yuh'se under, any day."

Snoots then turned to me.

"Say, Breeze, will yuh stand by fer me till I go down to the sick-bay? I got a little belly-ache."

"Sure," I said—"in five minutes. Wait till I go down to the radio office. I'll be right back. I want to see what that two-one-two-O-six radio was."

But I got no enlightenment in the radio-office. Jack Harris, the operator on watch, found and handed me the message 21206*, sent the night before to the flag-ship. But it was in code and told me nothing. I asked Harris for the code book.

"That's the secret code," he said. "The captain keeps that book locked in his safe."

So I returned to the bridge none the wiser. Scotty was in the act of hoisting the answering pennant. Snoots had his glass leveled on the flag-ship about to receive, and Dixie was at his elbow, pencil and pad in readiness

"All right, Snoots," I said; "I'll get it. Go ahead down to the sick-bay."

Snoots went below. The man on the flag-ship bridge then sent:

Proceed to Guantanamo Bay. Detailed instructions by radio later.

The flag-ship then signaled the rest of the ships to disregard our ship's movements. We changed our course a few degrees to the southward, and gradually veered away from the column.

"Theah goes ou' fu'lough," lamented Dixie, a little later. "Reckon we'll coal at Guantanamo; then go to Mexico, aw China, aw the No'th Pole, aw some place. Dawg-gawn."

Snootful, Dixie and I had planned a furlough upon the ship's arrival at Norfolk. We had six hundred dollars stowed in my ditty-box.

Snoots was taking a long time to go to the sick-bay, I thought. "Say, Dixie," I said, after an hour passed, "see if you can dig that bird up, will you? I suppose he's found a crap-game somewhere, and forgets he's on watch."

DIXIE didn't bring Snoots back. Dixie didn't come back. I didn't get off the bridge till noon, when Pete Miller, the quartermaster, with the afternoon watch relieved me.

"There they are," I said to Pete, handing him the glass and pointing at the column of battle-ships, now three miles off to starboard and gradually easing away. "We're heading for Guantanamo Bay. I don't know what for. See Snoots?"

"No. I thought he had the watch. Say, there's queer doings on this packet. I hear they've got a gang locked up down in the carpenter-shop. Lot of talk about mutiny going around."

"Mutiny!" The idea hit me funny. "On a battle-ship?"

"That's the talk. Oh, I suppose some fifteen or twenty of the black-gang got hold of some booze. Probably got drunk and hard-boiled. Wasn't room for 'em in the brig, so they put 'em in the carpenter-shop I don't know anything about it. Nobody does."

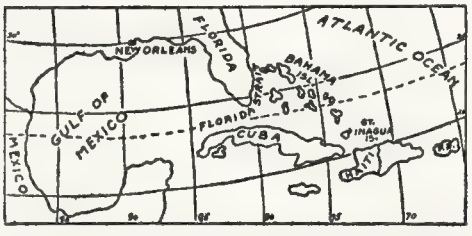
I was too hungry to stand there chattering over nothing. I went below to the eats. The mess-cook informed me that neither

*The time and reference number. Thus: (21—Twenty-first hour after midnight) (2—Twenty minutes after the hour) (06—Sixth day of the month) 21206—9:20 P. M., the sixth.

Snoots nor Dixie had been to dinner; that a pharmacist's mate had come for their rations. This meant that they were on the sick list.

So after dinner I went forward and below to the sick-bay on the berth-deck. Here all was buzz, hum and activity. The place was a beehive. Both doctors were stripped down to their undershirts. The senior doctor, Surgeon Waldo, was dancing about like a blue-ended fly, feeling pulses, inspecting tongues, barking orders. Off to one side his assistant, Surgeon Currant, was doing something to a man's arm. A half-dozen pharmacist's mates, towels on their arms, bottles, burettes in their hands, whirled and wiggled about like so many dancers about a May-pole. The bunks were all filled. Every one perspired. The smell of the place was sickening.

"Too —— many coming down here with nothing the matter with 'em!" Surgeon



GUANTANAMO BAY IS IN THE EXTREME EASTERN PART OF CUBA.

Waldo was saying—no, I'll take it back. He was roaring like a lion with a tooth-ache. "—— it! In a time like this! Keep all these duty-dodging malingerers and sight-seers and information-seekers to —— out!"

Says I to myself—

"Breeze, *as you were!*"

But before I could about face and start up the ladder, the old boy's wrath-filled eyes were on me.

"What's *your* trouble!" he demanded, swooping down upon me with a menace of expression that was terrifying.

It would have been far better for me had I told the doctor the truth and taken his growl. But I'd rather any day take a punch on the nose than a bawling out. And if I told him I'd merely come to learn what was the trouble with Snootful and Dixie—But there he stood, his glaring eyes on me.

"My stomach, sir——"

"Vomit?"

"Why—a little, yes, sir."

"Pains in your back, loins, limbs? Hm. Stick out your tongue. Hm. Looks all right. Any chills?"

"Yes, sir," I answered—but hanged if I know why.

"Followed by flushes of heat?"

"Yes, sir." That's the worst of a lie—it takes more lies to make it good.

"How long since you've been vaccinated?"

That word brought daylight. In one illuminative moment the whole thing burst on me—those "cases" the admiral wanted to know about; the "queer doings" Pete Miller had spoken of; our leaving the fleet and heading for Cuba; all this confusion and roundy-go-roundy about me.

"Well? Well?"

"Why, I feel much better now, sir, than I did——"

"How long since you've been vaccinated!" he roared.

"Three years. When I enlisted," I said, and as I spoke I had a very firm conviction that all was lost.

"Hm. Oh, Currant," he snapped to his assistant, "here's another one."

Then to me:

"Let's see your tongue again. Hm. All right, just step over there to Doctor Currant. He'll take care of you."

"What's *your* trouble!" This he barked at Patty Ryan, a seaman who had just come down.

"Came down to see how Holt is gettin' along, sir."

"Oh, you did, eh? Well, get to —— out of here!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

And Patty got.

I felt like feeding myself to the sharks. I might have walked away just as Patty had. Here I was, lined up for a vaccination and no telling what next—and all because I'd rather take a punch on the nose than a growl.

What next? The expression "Where do we go from here?" hadn't yet been put to music. The World War was then only a family quarrel.

After Doctor Currant had finished making scratches on my arm I was chased aft into the carpenter-shop, which adjoined the sick-bay. And here, among about forty others, I found Snoots and Dixie. Snootful was squatted on deck, his broad back to a stanchion, his big hands clasped about his

knees, and a serene grin on his moon-like face. Dixie was standing, leaning against the same stanchion.

"By gysh!" Snoots guffawed when he saw me. "Har, har, har! Breeze is got it too! Har, har, har!"

"What's the joke?" I said squatting before him.

"Why, we all got smallpox! Har, har, har!"

"Funny, all right," I said, after Snoots seemed to have finished his giggle.

"Yes, suh," concurred Dixie; "very funny."

"I haven't got the pox! I only came down here to see what was the matter with you fellows!"

"Neither have we!" Snoots broke out again. "Har, har, har!"

While he was thus enjoying himself I took a look around. Just imagine—forty of us packed into a twenty-by-forty compartment. Forty! And no way out of it, up, down or aft. The two doors leading aft were dogged down and locked. The two ladders leading above and below had been taken down. The only exit was one door leading forward to the sick-bay—and outside of this stood an armed marine. We were like so many trapped rats—only worse off. And this lunatic thought it was funny!

"How come you got nailed?" I asked Dixie.

"Why, when I came down, that doggone doctah was yellin' his head off about theh bein' too many sight-seein', info'mation-seekin' fools comin' down to the sick-bay with nothin' the matteh with them. I was afraid, did I tell him I'd only come down to see what was the matteh with Snoots, I'd get a growl. So I told him I had a little belly-ache——"

"That's the way they roped me!" I broke in.

"Har, har, har!" Snoots was off again. "An' the funny part of it is, har, har, har, I never had no belly-ache! I was only kiddin'! Har, har, har! I figgers I'll make the sick-list an' git a few days' rest. Har, har, har!"

Imagine it! The three of us locked up in a twenty-by-forty pest-house, among forty. Forty! Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle o' rum!

"Cheer up, fellers," he went on. "It's all in a cruise. We're all in the same boat. Looka Gillen over there. He looks like he's gonna be shot at sunrise. Cheer up, Gillen!"

Gillen, a big, husky, ugly master-at-arms, sat on the coffer-dam, fifteen feet from us, red murder written in every line of his scowling face. He was trying hard to wither Snoots with a glare—something that couldn't be done.

"Cheer up, Gillen," Snoots iterated. "Yuh might on'y be dreamin'."

Gillen's face reddened to yet a deeper red. A seaman getting familiar with a master-at-arms first-class! A seaman!! Actually getting fresh! His skin drew in, bunched in wrinkles about the eyes, like that of a snarling tiger.

"You're a funny monkey, ain't you," he growled through his teeth.

"Guess I am, at that," Snoots grinned. "Anyway I allus have to laugh when I look in a mirror. But I'd ruther have my face than yours, at that. Don't it git yuh sore to look in a mirror?"

This brought a chorus of laughs, for Gillen was anything but a beauty. He had leathery skin, a crooked nose, a cauliflower-ear, and cat's eyes.

During an argument of this sort there's always a pup in the crowd, watching for an opportunity to *yip yip* himself into the good graces of the bigger dog. In this case the pup was a square-head—a deck-hand named Johnson.

"Maybe Snoots won't think it's so funny when his face starts to break out."

While thus *yip-yipping* Johnson shot several glances toward Gillen to note progress.

"And after he gets over it, maybe it won't make him laugh to look in the mirror."

Johnson then moved over and leaned against the coffer-dam alongside of Gillen. He was a tall, loose, awkward kid, this square-head, with blond hair, blue eyes and pink skin.

"Now ain't he the nice doggie," grinned Snoots. "Don't he wag his tail nice. Aw, go on, Gillen, pet 'im. Don't you see 'im beggin' yuh to? Go on, call 'im a nice doggie. Looka how nice he stands there, waggin' his tail an' takin' your part."

Gillen, who hadn't once taken his glaring eyes off Snoots, slid down off the coffer-dam. Snoots arose from his squatting position. The two faced each other, six feet apart. Gillen spoke.

"Say—you're pretty —— fresh for a seaman."

"Yeah? Well, if yuh think yuh can take

it out o' me, hop in," invited Snoots. "There ain't no time like right now."

Gillen rushed. Snoots didn't hit him. As it looked to me, Snoots just stuck out his fist, and Gillen ran into it. It caught him full on the mouth. As well might he have rammed the end of a solidly planted post. He stopped, then went reeling backwards drunkenly. His teeth were red with blood.

"Finish him! Rush him, Snoots!" the gang chorused.

But Snoots waited till Gillen had recovered himself. Then they mixed it. For about five minutes they went at it hammer and tongs. It was straight, stand-up-and-smash. They were about evenly matched. Gillen was the faster and had the greater reach, but Snoots had more of shoulder-power and steam behind his wallops. Finally they clinched.

"Break! break!" shouted the gang.

Then I saw the square-head, Johnson, stick out his foot and try to trip Snoots. I elbowed over alongside of him. When again he tried it I handed him a clip behind the ear that sent him reeling.

The racket brought both doctors, followed by a stream of pharmacist's mates. Big Doc Waldo came tearing through the gang. He was a powerful man, that Doc. He just stuck his two big hands in between the faces of Snoots and Gillen and pulled them apart as if they were a pair of kids.

"What the ——'s the meaning of this!" he bawled.

"He came at me first, sir!" panted Snoots. "Leave it to any man here, sir!"

"He's a liar, sir!" bellowed Gillen. "Further, I want to report this man for insolence, sir!"

The pup, Johnson, tried to yip in.

"Sir, Bennet called Gillen——"

"Shut up!" roared Doc. "I don't care a —— how it started!"

He turned on Gillen.

"On duty, you're a master-at-arms; down here, you're a patient. Remember that! With me, your word goes *just as far* as that of a coal-passer!" He whirled and faced Snootful. "And you——"

He paused, as if he knew not what to say.

Snootful's grin was our greatest asset. It had turned many a bawling out into a laugh. It had, in fact, saved him and me from a court-martial or two. Why, only a week before, we had won ten dollars on that grin. I bet the biggest grouch on the ship he couldn't look at Snoot for five minutes without laughing. He lasted fifty-eight seconds.

Small wonder, then, that Doc Waldo, who had a keen sense of humor, took to his heels without finishing his sentence. At the door he halted and held his face straight long enough to announce that if there was any more rough stuff, the participants would wind up in strait-jackets.

IT WAS hot, close, sweaty down in that germ-hole. We were so crowded. And they kept coming—five new ones the first day, seven the second, nine the third. The doctor had our lazar-house enlarged, by opening the two doors at the after-end and including two more small compartments; but still we were crowded. They clustered about and clogged the portholes like flies. No wonder the air was foul.

And then the constant dread of the disease. Already many had developed pustular sores on their faces and hands. Keeping clear of these kept a fellow on the hop. In fact we did nothing but hop and duck and wiggle about all day.

We had our bags, hammocks and ditty-boxes right down there with us, all heaped in a corner. At night we spread our mattresses on deck, as far apart as space would allow; in the morning we rolled 'em up and tossed 'em in the heap.

Up to the morning of the fourth day the battle between Snoots and Gillen had not been resumed. They kept away from each other. But neither let the other get out of his sight.

"Watch your step," I cautioned Snoots that morning, for about the thousandth time. "He's got his eyes on you all the time."

"Don't think fer a minute I don't know it," he assured me. "An' jest notice that he's partickaler watchful when I'm takin' a drink o' water. He's wise that I got a bottle in my sock."

"Then you'd better get it out of your sock before the doctor comes around," I said. "If Gillen's dead sure it's in there, he'll blab."

For such was the nature of one of those things called a master-at-arms. In the eyes of a self-respecting jack-tar, a master-at-arms was morally on a par with a cockroach. He was looked upon as a white

mouse—a sneak. Any old-timer will tell you that the next most useless thing to a rat was a master-at-arms or "jimmy-legs." That's how he came to be a master-at-rams—by being useless in any other branch of the service. His job was to catch some one doing something. He rated senior to all the other petty officers.

These parasites are no more, thanks be.

"I think he's gonna pull that little stunt this mornin'," said Snoots after a while. "Both him an' his pup, Johnson, are watchin' me close this mornin'."

"Then slip the bottle to Dixie or me."

"No." He grinned. "You fellers jest watch things, that's all."

The doctor came in a little while. When he had finished inspecting tongues and asking questions, Gillen stepped up to him.

"Doctor," said the louse, pointing at Snoots, "that fellow has a bottle of alcohol in his right sock."

The doctor turned and looked Snoots up and down.

"Well?" he said finally, impatiently. "Break it out!"

Snoots bent over and out of his right sock drew a half-pint medicine bottle. It was about half-full. He handed it to the doctor, saying—

"I figgered, sir, I'd kind o' keep the disease out o' my system, by takin' a little o' this in a drink o' water now an' then."

"Uh-huh."

The doctor began working out the cork.

"I suppose there's no use asking you which pharmacist's mate gave it to you."

"I think I know who it was, sir," Gillen chimed in.

"——!" The doctor was sniffing at the bottle's opening. He held it out to Gillen.

"Does that smell like alcohol to you?"

Gillen's jaw fell as he sniffed of it.

"Well, I was positive, sir," he began, "I smelled alcohol——"

"What is it?" the doctor broke in, turning to Snoots.

"Salts, sir."

And Snootful's face went red with the red of triumph, as the doctor handed him back his bottle. Bending over and stuffing it back in his sock, he added: "I figgered it'd be a good way to keep clear o' the disease."

The doctor turned and bored Gillen with a pair of eyes that could bore.

"Gillen," he said, in a low but business-like tone, "I told you once that down here you're a patient. Don't make me tell it to you again."

When he had gone, Snoots stepped over to the heap of bags and hammocks, and brought forth his drinking-cup. Again he bent over and out of his sock came the bottle. He then stepped over to the water-cooler, where, after pouring himself a stiff hooker from the bottle, he filled the cup with ice-water.

"Here's fun, Gillen," he shouted, holding the cup aloft. "Here's fun to you an' your pup."

But mark-ee, 'twas not salts he drank. He had two bottles in that sock.

FOR over a week we smothered and boiled down in that disease-pit. By then there were more than seventy in the gang. The doctor had roped us off in three sections—the "scabs," the "germs" and the "lily whites." The scabs were in the after section, the germs in the middle and we lily whites forward.

We starved. Our bellies were fast falling flat against our spines. Oh, the grub they brought us was good, and there was plenty of it; but nearly all of us were too disgusted to look at it. Another two days would have brought mutiny. Our nerves were stretched to the snapping-point. Like so many dogs in a pound we squirmed and wiggled about, dodging contact with one another, snapping, snarling. We were red-eyed and ready to blow up. I looked for a rush toward that door to the sick-bay any minute. Four armed marines now stood outside of that door.

Yes, sir; we were desperate. One fellow actually tried to hang himself with his hammock lashing one night. Another snatched a bottle of iodine from a pharmacist's mate, and tried to gulp it. Both of those fellows are alive today, thanks to Snootful Bennet.

I kept my eye on Gillen and Johnson.

"That pair is going to pull a deep one on Snoots one of these days," I said to Dixie one evening. "Gillen's eyes shoot fire every time he looks at Snoots. He's rotten to the root, that bird. There's nothing he'd rather do than knife Snoots in the back. And the height of his pup's ambition is to be a master-at-arms. He'll do anything Gillen tells him to, figuring Gillen'll help him land the rate."

"Breeze," Dixie replied, "don't you

reckon Snoots so't of shows some lack of sense, mixin' with people like that?"

"Oh, I don't know——"

"I do." Dixie was slightly peeved. "'Nother thing; 'tain't only hisself he gets in dutch, but everybody who happens to be his shipmate as well. Myse'f I ain't aimin' to be enemies with no master-at-arms."

And with that Dixie walked away.

A half-hour later I was electrified by seeing Dixie in close confab with Gillen and Johnson. The three of them sat over in a corner on their ditty-boxes, talking in low tones. I called Snootful's attention to it. He only grinned. While we stood there talking it over, a shipmate said over my shoulder:

"Say, you two fellows better watch what you say to that guy you think is your shipmate—Dixie. He's been pretty thick with Gillen and the pup today."

"Don't think, old-timer," Snoots replied, "that we're walkin' around blindfolded. But thanks jest the same."

"It don't smell like Dixie," I said.

"It don't fer a fact," Snoots agreed. "He's about the last man on the ship I'd expect to see set down and chin-chin with that pair."

Dixie had always been a clean, above-board little shipmate. He had squirmed through a few tight squeezes with Snoots and me, and naturally we had come to look upon him as one of our family. His sitting there in the enemy's camp was beyond us.

"But there he is," I said.

And later that evening we tried to get in touch with him. Nothing doing. For some reason Dixie had suddenly turned sour on us. He didn't ignore us. Nay, nay. Those quick, dark eyes of his were on us, every move we made. When we moved he moved. And when we crowded him close, he simply eased over to Gillen and Johnson.

"What the ——'s eatin' on that bird!" Snoots growled to me late that evening, as the gang began spreading their mattresses on deck. "Look at 'im, will yuh, turnin' in over there between Gillen an' his pup!"

"Let him," I said.

"To —— with 'im!" was the way Snoots put it. "I can't lose sleep over the likes o' him."

Snoots seldom lost sleep over anything. Even the dread of the disease had so far failed to reach him. He was one of the very few whose stomachs had continued running true to form. Up to that night he hadn't lost so much as a wink of sleep. But that night he tossed, rolled, squirmed like a man with prickly heat. Every five minutes he rolled and lighted a cigaret. Toward early morning he eased over near me and whispered:

"Say, Breeze, I think the kid's awright at that. No-doubtly he's got somethin' in his head. I think he's jest playin' them two birds."

"Then why didn't he slip us a stand-by?"

"Well, if yuh'll figger it out, like I been doin' all night, yuh'll see. No-doubtly he heard them two talkin', an' got in on somethin'—or part o' somethin'. To git the rest he's gotta ease himself in with them. He figgers the best way to make friends with them is to make enemies with us. So he starts to throw us the cold shoulder. An' jest to make it look good, he's playin' off to us that he actually means it. Chances are he wants us to bawl 'im out right before the whole gang."

"Say!" I sat up.

"Hey, you guys," some one growled, "how about givin' us a chance to sleep?"

"We'll dope things out in the mornin'," whispered Snoots.

THE next morning we looked out through the starboard ports and saw the towering mountains of south-eastern Cuba. The ship was running close in—for the mountains slope almost straight down into the sea, and the water along that stretch of coast is deep and dark-blue. We passed a clump of dense foliage, which no doubt marked the outlet of a stream, for it lay between the bases of two mountains. We could see huts, people, and the brilliant colors of the swarms of birds in the trees.

The gang came to life. We wanted *out;* we wanted *off*—out of that hole and off that ship! A few wanted out-and-off so badly that they made attempts to squeeze through port-holes.

Throughout the forenoon Dixie gave Snoots and me a wide berth. We didn't know what to make of it, nor what to do. So we merely ignored him.

The ship anchored in Guantanamo Bay that afternoon. There was no tarrying. Did they want to get rid of us! The anchor-chain hadn't yet ceased thundering in the hawse-pipe, when a big navy tug pushed a

coal-barge alongside of us. One of the pharmacist's mates poked his head in the door and bawled:

"All right, all you fellows. Pick up thy beds and walk! This way out! Up—straight up to the fo'csle, over the rail and down the sea-ladder on to the barge!"

They were no gladder to get rid of us then we were to go. We had our bags, hammocks and ditty-boxes all lashed together. Out and up and over the side went we.

They landed us on an islet just below the mouth of Caimaneria River. It was nothing but a small bump of rock, clay and sand, about four acres, grown over with a tangled mass of thorny brush and lignum-vitæ trees, and inhabited by billions of ants, lizards, scorpions, centipedes, mosquitoes and fleas.

Doctor Waldo had detailed himself to cope with the situation, leaving Doctor Currant aboard. The task he faced must have been a disheartening one. He had only five pharmacist's mates with him. There were more than seventy patients. But Doc Waldo was not of the stuff that disheartens easily. You could see that by the cut of his jaw and the glint in his eyes.

He was no parlor Percy. He was neither built nor constituted along parlor lines. He had a broad, homely face. And feet! Well he needed big feet to support his two hundred pounds of baby-hippopotamus. That's what he was built like. He was a roughneck, from the top of his bald head to his toes. At the core of him was a big man's heart.

There was work for every man able to wiggle a toe. The beach was cluttered with camping-gear that had been sent over from the station-ship; this had to be toted up a steep hill to the site Doc Waldo had decided upon. There was the ground to clear, tents to pitch, insects to battle with. There were two small shacks on the island; one of these the cook claimed, the other the doctor. But not without a terrific and thrilling battle with rats, scorpions, centipedes, lizards and ants did we take those two shacks. We worked and fought and cussed for the rest of the afternoon.

What tickled us was the way the doctor sat on Gillen. Gillen wanted to stand around and boss things, as he was used to doing aboard ship.

"Say, Gillen," Doc yelled at him, "if you want to eat, get hold of an ax or something! There's only one boss here!"

And this was what we liked most about big, powerful, hard-boiled Doc Waldo—his impartiality. He played no favorites. They all looked the same size to Doc.

Before sundown we had pitched a little city on that bump of rock and clay. There were two streets, running at right angles, one end of each terminating at the doctor's shack, and the other ends petering off in the brush. We named them Lily White Street and Scab Boulevard. The intersection we called Germ Junction.

That evening, from Germ Junction we watched our ship get underway, steam out of the harbor, round the last buoy and disappear behind the mountains to the east. She went north, we learned later, to the Delaware breakwater, where she underwent a quarantine period and a thorough fumigating. I haven't seen the good old home since. None of the crowd she left on Smallpox Island went back to her.

SMALLPOX ISLAND didn't turn out so bad a place. Doc Waldo soon got us all sorted out. Along with about thirty other "false alarms" Snoots and I wound up on Lily White Street. We occupied a tent with the cook, "Ruination" Crosby. Dixie had pitched his doss with Gillen and Johnson, in a tent across the street from us. Over on Scab Boulevard were forty-three cases of smallpox, mostly mild ones, varioloids.

For the first week it was tough stuff. From dawn to sundown every lily-white one of us was busy, cutting down brush, uprooting stumps, patching the cook's and the doctor's shacks, laying floors in the tents, building the incinerator, latrines. But once over all these humps the going was not so bad. Each man had his routine bit to do in the forenoon—policing grounds, catching rats and scorpions, tending the incinerator, or rowing out to the boat, staked a few hundred yards off the island, for provisions sent over from the station-ship—and for the rest of the day he could ramble over the island, fish, play ball, collect sea-shells, make lignum-vitæ canes, shoot craps, or sit on his haunches in his tent, sucking his thumbs.

Snoots and I didn't have much time to suck our thumbs. On us fell the job of handling all the camp's communications.

There was no telephone connection between Smallpox Island and the rest of the world. We didn't know enough then to throw up an antenna, hook in a spark-coil and shoot it by radio. There was one radio electrician in camp, but that poor lad lay flat on his back in a tent on Scab Boulevard. Nothing could leave the island. So the only way we could get the fellows' letters home was to semaphore them over to the station-ship. The quartermasters over there turned them over to the yeoman, who typed and mailed them—the crew of the station-ship providing the stamps. Also, thus we ordered all the provisions; these the station-ship's launch delivered each morning to our stakeboat.

It was a long-winded process. The station-ship lay a good three miles across the bay, and her quartermasters had trouble receiving us. Standing there swinging our arms in the burning sun was anything but an easy job. In the hope of getting a little help in this, we hinted to the doctor that Dixie knew something of signals. But Doc only grinned and told us we were getting away with murder. And he kept Dixie on other details.

One thing we observed—but not till several weeks had passed—and that was that Dixie was always in the same working-party as were Gillen and Johnson. But of course this didn't savor to us of anything like design on the doctor's part. It was mere coincidence, we supposed; Doc juggled and shifted details about as names occurred on his list—and Dixie's name happened to be sandwiched between Gillen's and Johnson's.

But there was nothing coincident about the way Dixie was throwing us the cold shoulder. Not a word would he have with us. He wouldn't look at us! He would strain his insides to sidestep meeting us.

The weeks rolled by. The critical moment came. The collector of tolls came knocking. One, two, three shipmates left us—within three days. It was sad. We laid them away side by side, the doctor reading the service—"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust"—we standing around, our heads bared to the blazing sun. Indeed it was sad, but so it was to be.

From then on things grew better and better. We had cleared the hump. Scab Boulevard began to show signs of life. Doc Waldo's grin came back. It was like the passing of a storm. We had a couple or three ball games every day, and a smoker every evening down at Germ Junction. It was like being on furlough. Not one of us would have passed up the opportunity to finish his enlistment there.

ONE evening as Snootful, Ruination and I returned to our tent, after a two-hour wind-fest at Germ Junction, Ruination put us a question.

"Say, what do you suppose a man could want with a live scorpion?"

I passed.

"I take my nickel out," said Snoots.

"—in a glass jar?" Ruination added, a puzzled grin on his rotund face.

"A naturalist might amuse himself with one," I observed, sitting down on my cot. "But any time I see a scorpion I'm looking around for a club or a rock."

Snootful sat down on his cot and began removing his shoes.

"One come near gittin' me the other day," he said. "He had himself all rolled up nice an' snug in my semaphore flags, which I'd left layin' on the ground outside the doctor's shack overnight. Jest by luck I picked 'em up by the handles. If I'd grabbed 'em by the buntin' that scorpion would 'a' got me no-doubtly."

"Gillen's got one in a glass jar," said Ruination. "I went in their tent this afternoon looking for satisfaction. Gillen and Johnson took ten dollars from me the other day, matching coins. Little Dixie was in there alone, studying the scorpion through a magnifying glass. I asked him what he was doing with it. 'Search me,' he said. 'It's Gillen's.' It's a big one, too, about four inches long."

"Well," said Snoots, "he's welcome to monkey with poison——"

He broke off. The light of the lantern fell on Dixie, standing in the open end of our tent.

"Say, you fellahs," he drawled in that slow, tired-out tone, "the doctah done told me to pass the word around fo' eve'body to look beneath his blankets fo' centipedes an' bugs, befo' he tu'ns in."

With that Dixie turned on his heel. It was the first time he had spoken to Snoots or me since that evening at sea many weeks before.

"Didn't need to tell me that," laughed Ruination. "I always look before I flop."

"Well," said Snoots, "I don't allus, but jest fer luck I will tonight."

He stood up and threw back his blanket.

There it was—a big, live, wiggling scorpion.

"Man!" Ruination catapulted across the tent and grabbed up a baseball bat.

"Don't!" Snoots caught the bat in mid-air as Ruination swung it. "Don't bat 'im all over my bunk!" Then he picked up a shoe and scooped the squirming thing off his bunk on to the floor. "There! Clout 'im!"

Down came the bat, reducing the scorpion to pulp.

"Man!" Ruination felt of the back of his neck. "He was anchored under your blanket waiting for you!"

Snootful grinned.

"If I'd shoved my feet in without lookin', he'd 'a' got me no-doubtly."

Ruination threw back his blanket, and I mine. We found no more scorpions.

"Good thing the doctor told Dixie to pass that word around," observed Ruination.

I looked at Snootful. His whole attitude had suddenly changed. He now looked like a mad gorilla. A black scowl had replaced the grin on his bulldog face, his head and shoulders were thrust forward, his arms crooked. His eyes were blazing into mine.

"Oh, I got you, Snoots, old boy!" I ejaculated. "Did the doctor tell Dixie that, eh?"

"Did 'e!" he snapped.

"Did 'e?" I echoed.

"What the —— are you'se raving about —did-'e did-'e did-'e!" growled Ruination.

"Jest that!" Snoots answered. "Did the doctor tell Dixie to—" He paused a moment. "Breeze, you got your shoes on——"

Without waiting for him to finish I stepped out and headed up Lily White Street for Germ Junction. I found Doc alone, in a canvas chair out in front of his shack, taking a moonlight bath.

"Doctor," I said, "I thought I'd better report this. Bennet just found a live scorpion in his bunk. I thought it would be a good idea to remind all hands about taking a look before they turn in."

He was surprized.

"Hm! Found one in his bunk, eh. Why, yes; it hadn't ought to be necessary, but it might be a good stunt at that. I'll talk to all hands tomorrow morning. You might shoot that word from tent to tent before you turn in."

I carried out that order, then returned to our tent.

"Well?" questioned Ruination—"did-'e did-'e did-'e?"

"He did not," I answered. "Struck Doc as strange—a scorp in a man's bunk. But he didn't tell Dixie to carry that word around."

"Which means that Dixie is all blue, like I said he was in the beginning," said Snoots.

Then he turned to Ruination.

"Slide over an' see if Gillen's scorpion is still in that glass jar. Do it neat. Don't let 'em know what you're snoopin' fer."

Ruination stood up. In the lantern light his eyes gleamed intelligence. He saw the trend of our suspicions.

"Jest ease in an' ask 'em have they got any mosquiter oil or somethin'," suggested Snoots.

Ruination was gone and back in two minutes.

"I guess you're right," he whispered. "His scorp is gone."

For fully a minute we stood there in silence.

"Why not tell the doctor about it?" said Ruination.

Snoots thought long and hard.

"No," he replied finally. "I can't prove nothin'. Gillen put that animal in my bunk no-doubtly. But there's no convictin' a man jest on some one's say-so. Jest you fellers keep your traps shut. I'll git that bird myself—tomorrow."

THE next day was a busy one for Snoots and me. A ship was leaving the harbor for the States that afternoon, and the gang fairly swamped us with mail; seemed every man in camp had a couple of letters he hadn't thought of till the last minute. Beginning at sunrise, grabbing breakfast on the fly, ditto dinner, we stood out in the sizzling sun, alternating at sending and reading off, till mid-afternoon. It was three o'clock when Snoots finished sending the last letter.

He dashed the flags to the ground, and with his hat mopped his scarlet, sweat-oozing face.

"Now," he grunted. "Now we'll go up an' square yards with Gillen."

"Better take a rest first," I said. "Let's take a swim and get on some dry clothes."

Not he. There was fire in his eyes, a pugnacious set and thrust to his bulldog jaw and shoulders, and a cocky swing to his arms, as he strutted down Lily White Street with me at his heels.

"I'll need a bath more after I get through with that louse than before I start in on him," he replied.

"Think he'll fight?"

"He'll fight or jest stand there an' take a wallopin', one o' the two."

We entered the enemy's camp. In the tent were Gillen, Johnson and Ruination. They sat on a cot, matching coins, playing the three-cornered match game.

Old as this flimflam game is, there's many a good but callow sport caught at it every day. It's very simple. The three players turn up their coins. The odd man wins. That is, if two turn up heads and the other a tail, the tail wins. Two tails and a head, the head wins. Three of a kind, no one wins. The game is on the level—if they toss the coins in the air. But when they merely turn them over in their palms, so that each knows beforehand whether he's turning up head or tail, then nine times out of ten there's a "hen on;" that is, two of them are in cahoots to trim the third. One of these two signals the other what he is going to turn up—head or tail—and the other turns up the opposite. Then the third man—the sucker—must match one of them, leaving the other the winner, the odd man.

That's what Gillen and Johnson were doing to Ruination when Snoots and I entered their tent. Gillen and Johnson shot black scowls at us. The grin Ruination gave us was not that of a happy ship's cook; he bore all the earmarks of a loser. Gillen and Johnson had fair-sized piles of bills and coins before them, while Ruination had not more than seven or eight dollars.

I waited, watching Snootful aslant. For a few minutes he stood with arms folded, looking down on the play in silence. Finally he spoke, but to Ruination instead of Gillen.

"Mean to tell me you're as easy as that?"

Ruination looked up, mouth open, eyes blinking. "Why—wha'd'yuh mean?"

"Yuh poor ham!" Snoots jeered. "You're a —— of a ship's cook! Why don't yuh go over in your galley an' soak your head in hot grease? Can't yuh see through glass? How much have they got yuh fer?"

"Say—" Gillen stood up. "Who asked you to horn in here?"

"To —— with you!" Snoots snapped at him.

Then to Ruination he repeated—

"How much have they got yuh fer?"

Before Ruination could answer, Gillen had stepped over the cot and stood facing Snoots.

"Get out of this tent!"

"I'd ruther you'd put me out," Snoots shot back.

Gillen drew back and swung. In the same instant Snoots bored in, crouched, with his huge left fist held out like a battering-ram. Gillen's swing went over his head. With a hundred and eighty pounds of plunging bulk behind it, Snootful's big fist crashed into Gillen's right eye. So terrific a smash was it that Gillen fairly shot out through the tent's open end, and continued, trotting backwards, to the middle of the street, where he finally lost his feet and sprawled.

Snoots had followed him up close.

"Git up an' fight!" he snarled. "Put a scorpion in my bunk, will yuh! Git up an' fight, yuh dirty louse!"

Gillen lay on his back, with one hand feeling of his right eye—or rather, feeling of an egg-sized lump alongside of his right eye. He made no attempt to get up.

"Yuh dirty louse!"

Snoots reached over, grasped a handful of Gillen's jumper and jerked him to his feet. Then he let go and stepped back. But Gillen sat right down again.

Gobs are quick to scent a fight. They came galloping down Lily White Street like boys running to a fire. From up at Germ Junction, Doc Waldo saw, and he too came galloping, arriving just as Snoots again jerked Gillen to his feet.

"Can this rough stuff!" he bawled, pushing through the crowd.

Stepping between Snoots and Gillen, with a big hand against the chest of each, Doc pushed them apart.

"Now get me." Doc spoke straight out. There was nothing highflown or flowery about him. "Get me straight. You fellows don't settle this grudge in this camp. You'll have to hold it for three weeks. Tomorrow morning I expect to pronounce the last case cured. That means that we'll be here twenty-one days longer. In that time I don't want to see you two even *looking* at each other. Understand?"

He paused, looking from one to the other.

"But how about puttin' a live scorpion in a man's bunk, sir?" demanded Snootful.

Doc turned on him.

"Who?"

Snoots shifted from one leg to the other.

"Well," he answered lamely, "I can't prove it. I'll take that back."

Doc looked him up and down for a few moments, then went on.

"Of course, after we leave here—after you get over on board the station-ship—I don't care a rap what you do to each other. You can both run up to Caimaneria on liberty some afternoon and have it out. But remember—if you mix it again before we leave this island, I'll see that you both get a general court martial for disobedience of orders."

With that he turned and walked away. Fearful that Snoots would forget himself and swing on Gillen, orders notwithstanding, I took hold of his arm and said—

"Come on."

"Don't forget, Gillen," he flung back, "you an' me'll finish it sooner or later. An' yuh won't be the first man I put in the horsepital!"

Then his gaze fell on Ruination.

"Say, yuh poor ham," he grinned, "if yuh do any more matchin' with that pair, make 'em heave their coins in the air. They been shootin' yuh the jazz no-doubtly. Make 'em toss 'em in the air."

DURING our last three weeks on that island I kept one foot on Snootful's shadow. For I knew—and this regardless of Doc Waldo's threatened court martial—that every time Snoots got near Gillen a tangling of tails was imminent. So I kept close enough to Snoots to light on his back.

Dixie continued to look through us, when ever we met him, as if we were made of air, or glass. But wait. Once—early in our last week it was—we met him one afternoon coming round the corner of Ruination's galley, and he dropped us a hint.

"Say, fellahs—" He spoke hurriedly, glancing furtively about him—"keep you' eyes an' you' eahs wide open an' you' mouths closed. The's a fix-up on you, Snoots. I cain't take long enough to tell you about it. If they see me talkin' to you fellahs ev'ything be all off."

With that he walked away, stiffly, head in the air—as a peacock might walk away from two ducks.

"But what the ——!" Snoots grinned and turned to me. "Keep our eyes open fer what? What are they up to?"

I passed. Dixie's ways were too devious for me to follow.

"First," Snoots went on, "he drops us like we're hot coals. Then he won't talk to us fer three months, on'y fer long enough to slip us the dope there's a scorpion under my blanket. An' now— Oh, well—" Snoots was ever an optimist—"things'll come out awright no-doubtly. Dixie'll no-doubtly tell us all about it on our furlough."

That long overdue furlough—the one Dixie, Snoots and I had planned, remember, in Marseilles, France—was now drawing near. I still had our six hundred dollars in my ditty-box. Besides, we each now had three months' pay coming.

"But if you want to make that spurt with Dixie and me," I said, "you better keep your paws off Gillen. Don't forget what Doc said. If you mix it with that bird again on this island, you'll wind up sweeping navy-yard streets with a marine on your tail."

"No-doubtly." He grinned. "I won't take a clip at 'im if I can help it. But I wonder what kind of a game him an' his pup is stewin' up."

"It's a barbecue of some kind. I wonder too."

We continued to wonder for a few days longer. Strictly, we didn't tumble till the trick had been put over—till Gillen and his pup, Dixie helping, had buried the knife, hilt-deep.

It happened in the afternoon of our last day in camp. All hands were busy that afternoon, getting together their things to be fumigated. We were to break camp next morning and go aboard the station-ship. Our future was indefinite. Doc had told us we would go north in the first outbound collier or transport, to one of the receiving-ships—probably Norfolk. Every man in the gang would get thirty days' furlough, Doc had promised.

Two of us got three years' furlough.

They pulled it neat. Dixie began it. About two o'clock that afternoon he emerged from the tent across the street. From the middle of the street he called:

"Say, Bennet, I just found a photo in

mah ditty-box, belongin' to you. It's in on mah cot. Go get it."

With which Dixie set out up the street toward Germ Junction.

"What photo?" Snoots shouted after him.

"It's in on mah cot," Dixie flung back without stopping. "Go get it. I don't want the dawg-gawn thing."

Puzzled, Snoots turned to me. "What the ——? I gave him a picture o' my sister one time. Wonder if that's what he means."

"Go ahead over and see," I said. "Don't expect me to cipher out the workings of that bird's nut."

Snoots crossed the street and entered the enemy's camp. He wasn't in that tent longer than five seconds. When he returned I noted that he held a small photograph.

"It's my sister's picture," he said, holding it out to me. "I gave it to him a long time ago. But what's the idear? He gits it in his nut all of a sudden that he don't want my sister's picture, an' comes out of his tent yellin' fer me to come an' git it."

"Wait a minute," I cut in. "There's a hen on somewhere. Are the other two in that tent?"

"Gillen an' Johnson? Sure. Both layin' on their cots, snoring'."

"Yeah?" I pointed across the street. "Then they snapped out of it pretty sudden."

Gillen and Johnson had just emerged from their tent and were starting in the direction of Germ Junction.

FIVE minutes later Doc Waldo, trailing Gillen, Johnson and Dixie, came down Lily White Street and turned in at our tent. Snoots and I stood to one side as the procession filed in.

Doc halted before Snoots, looking him straight in the eyes, as if trying to read what lay behind them. Snootful returned his gaze without the quiver of an eyelid. The rest stood about promiscuously. Dixie's face was as unreadable as stone. Johnson fidgeted on his feet, his eyes wandering restlessly about. Gillen stood with his hands behind him, looking at Snootful's knees. Finally the doctor broke the silence.

"Bennet, I'm sorry for this." His voice was slightly husky. "You're the last man in the camp I'd expect anything like this from. —— it, Bennet, I'd have staked my commission on you being white!"

Snoots blinked stupidly, as if he'd received a tap over the head.

"But what the —— did I do, sir?"

"Now cut it right there!" Doc's eyes flashed like diamonds. "Don't stand there and fire lies into my teeth! If you're a thief own up to it! You'll get off lighter."

He shook a big forefinger under Snootful's nose.

"But get this: I'm less in sympathy with a liar than I am with a thief!"

Snoots was lobster-red, and his eyes seemed about to pop out. His jaws began chop-chopping up and down in a gush of denial.

"That'll do!" Doc checked him. Then to me—

"Were you in on this too?"

I looked around. Gillen, his arms folded now, cocksure, complacent, stood regarding me with narrow, glittering eyes. Johnson, too, now wore an all's-well expression on his pink-skinned face. The doctor was with them. They had their man. Dixie stared stubbornly and unblinkingly at the floor.

"I don't know yet, sir, what it's all about," I replied.

"Aw, the —— you don't!" Gillen spoke up. "The two of you were in here together. You saw him cross the street and go in our tent. You were with him here after he came back."

"That's right," I admitted. "But what did he do in your tent? I didn't follow him over there, you know."

The pup horned in.

"What we want to know is, what did he do when he came back here?"

"Yes," Gillen followed him up. "What did he do with my watch?"

"Bennet," said Doc, "you're accused of stealing a gold watch from the head of Gillen's cot, about ten minutes ago. What have you got to say?"

"It's a —— lie, sir!"

"Doctor, this is a frame!" I oared in. "That pair has been trying to get Bennet for about three months—ever since the afternoon——"

"That's enough out of you," Doc cut me off. "You were in their tent," he resumed to Snoots.

"Yes, sir. I went in there to git a picture o' my sister that Dixie had hollered over fer me to come an' git."

"Now that's an honest-to-goodness fact," confirmed Dixie, without raising his eyes.

"He went in our tent to get said photo. I saw 'im g'win. Saw 'im c'mout too."

Doc heaved a great sigh.

"Well, Bennet," he said, "the point is, these two men state that they saw you take a watch that hung by its chain from the head end of Gillen's cot. And so——"

"They're a pair o' —— liars, sir! When I was in their tent they were both snorin' their heads off like——"

"And so, perhaps the best thing to do would be to hand over the watch. Or——"

Snoots began undressing. He had on only a pair of dungaree trousers, an undershirt and shoes. In half a minute he stood under bare poles, shaking his undershirt aloft with one hand, his trousers, pockets turned out, with the other.

"Naturally," Gillen sneered, "a fellow wouldn't keep a watch he'd just pinched in his pocket."

"There's me ditty-box an' sea-bag," invited Snoots. "Go through 'em."

"Do that," Doc commanded, nodding to Gillen. "Perhaps, though—" He hesitated, eying me shrewdly—"perhaps we'd save time by first searching his shipmate."

"No, sir," I shot back; "and I'll tell you why. They're not out after my scalp. Bennet is the man those two skunks want to see hang, sir. You see, doctor, if they'd planted that watch among my belongings it would weaken their case against Bennet. He's the boy they're after. I believe, sir, in fact I'll lay the six hundred dollars in that ditty-box to six cents that you'll find that watch in this tent—among Bennet's belongings, right where that fellow, or his pup, planted it. It's a rotten frame! That pair——"

"Oh, tut tut," Doc checked me, and motioned Gillen to go on with the search.

"Might as well be a clam, Breeze," Snootful grinned.

In silence we watched Gillen search Snootful's ditty-box. This took only a few seconds. Then he lay hold of my shipmate's sea-bag, upended it, but paused in the act of dumping its contents on deck.

"I don't like to dirty all his clothes," he said. "I'll dump 'em on his bunk."

"Now that's nice an' considerate," Snootful scoffed. "I never knew you to suffer from 'largement o' the heart before."

I had the same thought. I'd seen enough of "Dirty" Gillen to know that it was not the thought of soiling Snootful's clothes that deterred him. Not Gillen. What he wanted to get away from was the piecemeal search of Snootful's clothing. Why all that tedium, when he knew the exact location of the planted watch. I thought of all this, and wanted to remark on it, but in so fleeting an interval couldn't get my tongue going.

Gillen upended the bag on Snootful's cot. Then, before dumping its contents, to make room he reached over and picked up the pillow, apparently intending to toss it over on to Ruination's or my bunk. In so doing he uncovered the little joker. There lay his watch and chain.

With his right hand Doc took the watch, and with his left drew from his pocket a pair of handcuffs.

The instant he saw those things of shining steel Snootful Bennet of the twentieth century ceased to be. In his place stood the wild, ferocious animal, the red-eyed naked man-ape of a million years ago, whose big idea was, "Do before you're done!" and who *did* with club, teeth and nails.

"Hang me!" he snarled through frothing teeth. "Yuh ——! Awright! Git a bite while you're gittin' a bellyful! yuh ——! 'Swell hang fer a sheep as a goat! Yuh ——!"

And growling, frothing, rolling his red eyes, Snoots danced this way and that in a frantic effort to get past Doc to Gillen. He hula-hulad, shimmied, leaped, wheeled, gyrated like a monkey on springs—but all to no avail, for Doc danced, whirled and pivoted with him move for move, keeping Snoots before and Gillen behind him.

And Gillen? He danced along move for move with Doc, on his ugly face the look of a man whom the animals were hot after. Gillen wanted out. But there was no getting out; the twisting, wiggling Snootful, with his back to the tent's open end, held the advantage of position.

Dixie and I had scurried over into a corner, where we were huddled together—in the clear.

Johnson, who had worked his way round to the front end, tried to trip Snoots from behind—great trick that pup had of sticking out a foot. Snoots handed him a backhand rap across the mouth that brought blood spurting and sent the square-head rolling out into the street.

Snoots spun, in delivering that swing, and for a small part of a second his back

was turned to Doc and Gillen. In that moment Gillen leaped passed Doc for the opening. When Snoots recovered equilibrium his man was gone, and Doc blocking his way out.

Snoots made a feint, lunged as if to pass the doctor on his right, and, as Doc reached out to grab him, pulled back and shot past him on his left.

Up Lily White Street gallops the whole parade of us. The naked Snoots was about fifty feet behind Gillen. Doc Waldo, plunging like a porpoise, was about the same distance behind Snoots, and leading me by about thirty feet. Johnson, who hadn't yet recovered from the rap of Snootful's knuckles, lay sprawled in the street wondering what had hit him. Dixie was close on my heels, panting over my shoulder.

"Dawg-gawn you, Breeze, get out of the way an' let some one run who knows how to run! Let me get that boy Snoots befo' he catches Gillen! Dawg-gawn fools, you fellahs!"

We rapidly overhauled Doc, whose years and bulk were against speed. He was blowing, snorting like a foghorn, and bellowing Snootful's name with all he had of lung-power, threatening general court martial, strait-jacket, keel-hauling. But he was only wasting wind. For at that moment had a ton of dynamite exploded within a few yards of him, Snoots wouldn't have heard it.

Gillen shot into Germ Junction, rounded the doctor's shack on one leg, then straightened out and, lost in a swirl of dust, flew down Scab Boulevard, with Snoots now only thirty feet behind him.

Neck and neck Dixie and I passed Doc on the turn.

"Get that fellow! Get him!" he shouted after us.

"Dawg-gawn you fellahs!" panted Dixie. "Man, you the most densest fellahs! Couldn't you see the doctah knew all about it? That it was all a game?"

"Game? He had handcuffs!"

"Fo' Gillen," he grunted. "'Notheh paih in his pocket fo' the pup. I told Doc eve'thing—this mawin'—befo' eveh they tried to pull the trick. Couldn't you fellahs see he was only givin' them enough rope? They done already hung themselves!"

Oh, sure! Now I could see! Doc had known all the time. Dixie had wised him up beforehand of the frame-up. Fine! Doc had gone through that farce in our tent—had affected to believe Snoots was a thief—merely to give the two rats rope enough to hang themselves. Superfine!

Hunky-dory indeed—unless Snoots caught Gillen. He'd kill him!

I could always run. No man had ever been able to catch me when I wanted to sprint. The way I tore away from Dixie made him appear to be standing still.

So could Snoots run. When Gillen rounded the last tent down on the suburban end of Scab Boulevard and headed across the baseball diamond, Snoots was reaching for him. Gillen must have felt the breath of him on his neck, for he managed to maintain his lead all the way across the ball grounds to Lily White Street, where, still leading Snoots by an inch more than arm's reach, he once more pointed for Germ Junction.

And me? Of course no one was timing me, therefore I can't prove it, but I know I smashed the world's sprinting record in that dash down Scab Boulevard and across the ball-field. I was thirty feet behind Snoots when he turned off the Boulevard; twenty, when he crossed second base; ten, turning into Lily White Street; and as we flew into Germ Junction I was reaching out and feeling of the back of him with my finger tips.

I'm a little hazy on just how this happened. Whether Gillen stumbled, or was pushed or tripped by Snoots—possibly Snoots trod on his heels. Anyhow, the three of us bowled over in a heap, with Gillen on the ground, Snoots on top of him, and me, heels skyward, flying over the pair of 'em.

Bang! Know what it is to get a bump on the bean? My lights flickered—didn't go out, understand—just simply—well, flickered—that's the word—for a few moments. I went whirling, but only for a few moments.

"Yah yah yah yah yah yah yah!" I heard, along with a rapid thump-thump-thumping, as of a club, on the ground.

I came out of it. Vision cleared. What I saw was enough to bring any man out of it. Not ten feet from me murder was being done!

Blue in the face, eyes popping, tongue out, Gillen lay on his back, with Snoots astraddle of him, hands at his throat, shaking his head up and down as a terrier shakes a rat.

"Yah yah yah yah yah yah yah!" And

with every "yah!" Gillen's head bumped the ground.

Then the gang came swarming about us. Great Heavens, it was about time! Given another half-minute, Snoots would have beaten his brains out!

It took the combined strength of about a dozen arms to break Snootful's hold. After that it took three big huskies to hold him while Dixie and I were reasoning him back to his senses. And not until we'd been buzzing in his ears for a half-hour did the mad red leave his eyes. Even then he continued to eye us with suspicion.

He walked away from us, presently, went over and sat down on the stoop of the doctor's shack.

"Dawg-gawn!" Dixie ejaculated. "He must be some het up when he don't feel that hot boa'd undeh his skin. Hot dog! I couldn't hold mah hand on that step fo' two seconds—an' he's sittin' hisse'f right down on it in his ba'e skin!"

Meanwhile Gillen had been carried to a nearby tent and stretched out on a cot. It took the doctor nearly an hour to revive him. During that time the twenty or so of us ganged about the doctor's front stoop received various rumors from different pharmacist's mates coming out of the tent. First it was a fractured skull; then concussion of the brain. Gillen would live. He didn't have a chance in a million. If he did live he would be a lunatic for the rest of his life. He was dead. He'd be all right in an hour or so.

Finally Doc came out and slowly approached us. His face was drawn, grim, and his eyes were fixed on Snoots, who still sat on that red-hot step.

"Bennet," he began, "what were you trying to do, pommel that fellow's brains out?"

Snoots scratched the back of his neck and replied—

"No-doubtly I was, sir."

"Hm." Doc grinned. "Lucky for you that —— gave him a skull of armor plate. What was your idea?"

"Well, sir, when I sees you pullin' them handcuffs I figgers I'm no-doubtly headed fer over the road anyway, so I might as well make it worth while. I didn't know you was wise, sir, an' only playin' off. Dixie never told Breeze an' me."

"No," spoke up Dixie. "Fo' the reason that you and Breeze talk too much with you' mouths."

A short silence followed. We all held our breaths. It looked as if Snoots was in for something. Doc's face wore the grim aspect of a judge about to pronounce sentence.

"You're a queer fish, Bennet," he said at length. "Out of one mess and into another. Just when I was about to spring a surprize on you—give you the fun of putting the handcuffs on those two crooks—you had to spoil the whole show. And what did I tell you three weeks ago about keeping your hands off that fellow? Eh?"

"But, sir——"

"Don't 'but' me!" Doc pointed a long finger and his voice rose. "Lad, there's more education for you in this little experience than you'd get reading ethics and philosophy for the rest of your life—if you've got the common sense to see it. There's just one fellow in this world you've got to watch. Know who?"

"Myself, sir."

"That's him. And you'd better watch him! I don't believe in hell, but I know there are penitentiaries. They're hell-holes, lad. I was head surgeon in one for a couple of years, and I know. Keep away from 'em! Watch that fellow inside of Bennet! He came within a finger-snap of sending you to a penitentiary for life this afternoon!

"You know—" He lowered his tone—"the only intrinsic difference between you and the ape is that you can reason and he can't. That's the wedge between you—reason. And all you do when you let yourself fly off into a red rage, is pull out and throw away that wedge. Beat it now and get on some clothes."

WELL, sir, we broke camp next morning and went aboard the station-ship. A couple of weeks later we were transferred to the receiving-ship at Norfolk in one of the colliers. We got good treatment there. They gave us all the furlough we asked for; some of us got as high as sixty days.

Snoots begged the doctor to try to get Gillen and Johnson off with straight kick-outs. But Doc would not have it so. Said he:

"If they were just a pair of ordinary thieves, I'd say yes, give them a chance. But a man who'll try to brand another with a crime, just out of petty revenge—absolutely no! They rate the limit. They'll sweep navy-yard streets."

And they did—for three years.

THE HEROISM OF A PIONEER GIRL

by **Lewis Appleton Barker**

PROUD as we may be of the many courageous and daring acts of the early male settlers on the Western frontier, those of their women will not suffer any by comparison. Out of many such, the following example of both moral and physical heroism in a mere girl seems particularly worthy of relation.

There is no name blacker in the annals of the early Indian Wars than that of Simon Girty. He was the offspring of crime, his father being a sot and his mother a woman of no character. Captured by the Indians after Braddock's defeat, he was adopted by the Senecas, outdid them in savagery, and exercised his innate wickedness for twenty years, during which his name was a synonym of terror in the Ohio country.

In the Summer of 1777, with about four hundred Indian warriors, he invested Fort Henry, situated on the site of what is now the city of Wheeling, appearing before the little stockade early on the morning of September 1st. The settlers, having warning of his approach, were all in the fort.

A reconnoitering party under Captain Mason, being ambushed, more than half of them were killed, as were all but four of twelve men who sallied out under Captain Ogle to assist them. The garrison was thus reduced at the very start to only twelve men and youths, among whom were Colonel Shepard, and Ebenezer and Silas Zane.

Although encumbered with women and children, Colonel Shepard's reply to Girty's demand for surrender was that the garrison should never be surrendered so long as an American was left to defend it. The besiegers outnumbering the besieged full forty-fold, for six hours they kept up an ineffectual fire. At noon the Indians retired to the base of Wheeling Hill.

It was then that the little garrison discovered that their powder was nearly exhausted. Ebenezer Zane remembered that in his cabin, sixty yards away, was a keg of powder. It was apparently certain death to go for it; and Colonel Shepard, refusing to order any one on such a mission, called for volunteers.

Every man present demanded the privilege of going; and so great was the contention for the honor that Elizabeth Zane, a sister of Ebenezer and Silas, begged permission to be the messenger. She was but a young girl, having just returned from completing her studies at Philadelphia, and though totally unaccustomed to border warfare had been doing her part in casting bullets, making cartridges and loading rifles.

At first she was peremptorily denied, but upon her urging that her life was of less value than that of a man, consent was at last wrung from them. Fearlessly passing the gate, she boldly walked across the space to her brother's door, the savages watching in silent amaze. But when she reappeared bearing the keg of powder and sped with the utmost fleetness toward the fort, they awoke from their lethargy and sent volley after volley in her direction; but providentially not a bullet touched her.

Reaching the block-house in safety, the much-needed powder reheartened the little band to repulse the attack that was made at two o'clock. At four of the next morning Colonel Swearingen and fourteen men fought their way in without loss and when at daybreak Major M'Culloch arrived with a reenforcement of forty men Girty and his fellow savages gave up all hope of ultimate success. So, setting fire to everything without the palisades and slaughtering all the cattle within reach, they raised the siege, departing for the wilds.

The garrison did not lose a defender during the siege, the twenty-three who were slain having been killed before it really commenced. The fact that the enemy lost from sixty to one hundred, together with the other surrounding circumstances, renders the defense of Fort Henry one of the most remarkable of the many conflicts of the period.

THE GAP IN THE FENCE

by John Eyton

Author of "Ood" and "The Holy Tiger."

RIDE down any village street in India, and a score of lean dogs—brown and lemon-colored and mustard-colored and white—will dash out to bark at you and snap at your pony's heels. A wave of your whip will scatter them, for they seldom have spirit; though, if your own dog chanced to be disabled and solitary, they might make a concerted effort for the sake of meat. They have much in common with the jackals, for it is with them and the crows and the vultures that they share the spoils of the village rubbish heap. They are pie-dogs—pariahs.

Their name is legion. They are so thick on the ground that few of them have individual names, or, indeed, individuality of any kind. Home and mastership are denied them, for the laborer in the fields has no leisure for imparting his individuality to a dog. He leaves them to fend for themselves and to tussle for malodorous trifles on the dunghill. Sometimes one of them steals from him. Then he breaks its back with a bamboo pole.

If he desires to insult his neighbor particularly, he calls him a dog, or the son of a dog; and, when he uses that term, he has in his mind just one of these. The neighbor is justly incensed, because he also has in his mind one of these. In fact they both picture a scarred, lean cur of nondescript color with furtive yellow eyes, a short coat rubbed bare in patches, a limping fore-leg, prominent ribs, and a skulking gait. And, having bandied so nameless an animal between them, they go their ways and wash.

Such is the village dog in India, and such was the Tailless One, concerned in this story.

He was so called to distinguish him from a score or more whose tails happened to be intact, his own having been severed by the heavy wooden wheel of a bullock cart when he was six months old.

Of his ancestry who shall speak? The like of his forefathers scrambled for Jezebel at the gate of Jezreel, just as he and his like were wont to scramble for perished ox-hide at the gate of Lungipur. Perhaps, long before either Jezreel or Lungipur were built, a sandy whelp of the wild—bigger than a fox, smaller than a wolf, but partaking of the lineaments of both—was taken and tamed by a man; cuffed and stoned and turned on to the dungheap; yet came back and haunted the steps of the man, who, pleased to have discovered a creature which delighted in buffets, called it his dog. Who knows? At least there lurked in the Tailless One some lost look of the wild.

It lay in the shape and the set of the head—a certain alertness—almost a nobility, if the eye rested there and traveled no farther. For the body and legs were degenerate. He had lived on pickings, and the fare had never filled his ribs. He had never been immersed in water, his only bath being of

"*The Gap in the Fence*," *copyright*, 1923, *by John Eyton.*

yellow dust, well suited to his color. Save for the head, he was a thing of shreds and patches, and even in the head there were disappointing elements—the eyes for instance. They were utterly expressionless. They never lighted up at the sight of food, or of a friend or a fight. There was no life in them. They were simply dull, yellow orbs, so dispassionate that they might well have been blind.

His mere survival was extraordinary, for he was by no means one of the fittest. He had suffered innumerable catastrophes. Often he had been set on, as the weakest, by all the dogs of Lungipur, and had only escaped, quivering with pain, when they had started scuffling among themselves. He had been bitten by jackals, stoned by boys, and more than once a back-breaking bamboo pole had been aimed at him.

He belonged to Lal Chand, who occupied a tumble-down hovel of mud and straw at one end of the street. He belonged, but he was not owned or recognized. At most he was suffered to exist in an incredibly foul yard at the back of the house, which he shared with gawky chickens, making his exits and his entrances by means of a gap in the wooden fence. If a neighbor, humorously inclined, twitted Lal Chand with the ownership of the Tailless One, Lal Chand would spit and once more register his oft-repeated vow of knocking the dog on the head. However, being loath to soil his hands, he never carried it out, though he ventured to hope that some one else would.

It must not be thought that Lal Chand was devoid of humanity. He was morose, perhaps—*mugra* they call it in India—but then he had to keep himself and his son on what he could scrape from one small field—fifty rupees, or about sixteen dollars a year.

His wife had died of starvation, and, being unable to afford a second, he had centered all his hopes and joys in his little son—a brown baby of two years. He was a weazened child, with serious, unsmiling eyes in a big head, and a wretched body—but Lal Chand loved him. Though he went himself with an old rag round his middle, he bought a pink cap for the child at market. So, clad in a tinseled pink cap and a liberal coat of dust, the child would sprawl in the unsanitary yard with the Tailless One.

There was an old friendship between them, which had started prosaically enough. The child's body had for some obscure purpose been smeared with *ghi*—a strong-smelling clarified butter, used indiscriminately for garnishing the dinner and the person—and the dog had been hungry. So the dog had licked the child, and the child had liked being licked. Thus a mutual benefit society had been formed, and it had blossomed gradually into something more sentimental. Some instinct of play in the child and a desire to be owned in the dog had merged into a friendship. They would sprawl together by the hour in the dust. The dog would lick, and the child would play with its ears. But when, in the evening, Lal Chand was heard returning from his field, the dog would creep away through the gap in the fence, and Lal Chand would find his son alone.

II

LUNGIPUR was on the edge of the jungle; and a wasteland, overgrown with scrub and thorn, pressed to the very fences.

Thus to pass through the hole in the fence meant walking from comparative civilization—as exemplified by chickens and a child—into the wild, where anything might lurk and anything might happen. There were paths in the wasteland, but they were stealthy paths, worn by wanderers—jackals and foxes and dogs. The rank *lantana* bushes closed over these little alleys and made the place almost impassable for man. No grass grew there and nothing thrived except the poisonous blackberries and the orange-colored blossom on the bushes. The ground was littered with bowlders and dead wood and bones. The bones were perhaps the most prominent feature of the wasteland. There were so many of them, and they lay so strangely. Of the many animals that had died there, not one apparently had died naturally. They had all been mauled and dragged. Some bones still hung together. Some had been scattered. Some were white. Some were green with age. But two characteristics they had in common. They had all been picked clean, and they all owed their presence in the wasteland to the same agency—a panther.

For ten years—the age of the oldest and the greenest bones—he had been the scourge of Lungipur. He had first descended on the

village in the heyday of his youth, glorious in his ruddy Winter motley, full of fire and zeal. On the very first night he had killed a young buffalo, and had found success so sweet and the village so conveniently placed that he had stayed ever since, living in a thick tangle of thorns on the edge of a *nullah*, from which fastness not even elephants could dislodge him.

Generally he struck in the dark, but in any case it was useless to attempt to shoot him. Living in the midst of them, he knew mankind too well. But when a young official, fresh from England, came on tour to Lungipur, he was generally shown the bones and persuaded to spend a few fruitless hours in a tree over the most recent corpse, in hope of the panther coming out to feed. But the panther never came on such occasions. He could gauge the unnatural silence and stealth which indicated hunting to a nicety.

The villagers, however, knew him perfectly well by sight. Hardly a man who had not some time or other seen him slinking through the wasteground and recognized him for the scourge he was. His life's history was written on his body as well as on the ground, for little by little he had abated his early energy and deserted young buffaloes for ponies, and ponies for goats, and goats for dogs—each stage of his kills corresponding to a stage in his physical and moral decay. Thus the recent skeletons of his feasts were small skeletons, and he often went hungry. But there was no going back in this rake's progress. Having once descended to killing dogs, he forfeited the nerve for the quick leap on to the back of a pony or a buffalo. And, after dogs, there was only one possible kill for him—the unspeakable thing—a child of man.

His once splendid coat had turned dull and patchy. His motley had lost the deep ruddy tinge and the gloss. He was scarred about the shoulders by wild pigs' tushes, for on occasion he had had to fight for his pride of place. He was hairy-heeled, and lumbered in his walk. All the old, wonderful litheness of tread had deserted him. He was ignoble and mean—a dog stealer, a scavenger—and his days were numbered.

But, as has been said, there remained for him still one stage of degradation, and he took that stage too, when, hearing one evening the laugh of a child, he crept up to the gap in the fence. The unspeakable thing was in his heart.

He sat down, as a cat sits before a mouse hole, and waited for the dusk. Occasionally, as sounds came from the village—a dog's bark, or the call of a goat, or the sound of a beaten drum—he turned his head. The gesture was furtive—guilty almost—and, though the ears went back angrily and the yellow teeth showed in the sullen, underhung jowl, it was the display of a craven in anger. He made no sound, and no other movement, save when he licked his lips.

The gap in the fance would just admit of the passage of his long, lean body. Just through the gap in the fence, he could hear the child laughing, as if in play. He could see one little brown foot.

III

THE voice of Lal Chand was heard in the street. Slowly the Tailless One rose from beside the child and scratched his ear. Then, stretching his hind legs to take out the stiffness, he walked painfully toward the gap in the fence.

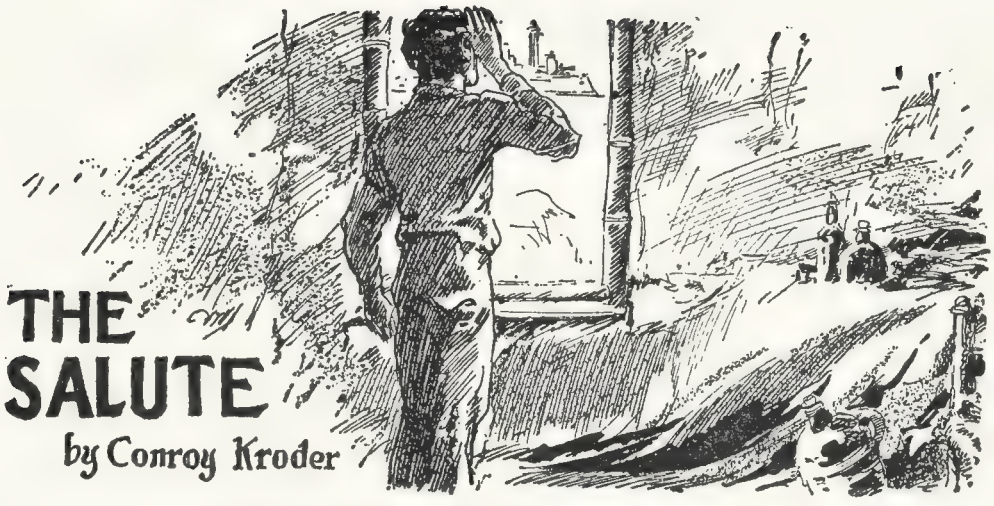
Suddenly he pulled up.

Who can say what passed through his head? It had been his habit to cringe. Cringing was bred in his bone. It was the lesson of his life. A look, a gesture, a sound had always been enough to make him cower and dive for shelter. Yet, at this moment, in the face of the most implacable enemy a dog knows, the thin hackles of his neck slowly rose, and he bared his fangs.

It can only be surmised that some dim spark of that marvelous instinct of service or slavery that makes a dog the friend of man kindled and flared even in this emaciated thing of shreds and patches, so that he remembered his forgotten heritage. For, though the body remained even in defiance the mean shell it had always been, the head took on a carriage almost of nobility, and, for the first and the last time in his life, the eyes lighted up.

At a bound he was through the gap in the fence.

THE curious thing is that, if a man calls his neighbor a panther or the son of a panther, no offense is taken. Rather, the reverse.



THE SALUTE

by Conroy Kroder

Author of "Trouble in Company D," and "The Ghost Intrigue."

HOT! Say, at eleven o'clock at night it was still so darn hot that the stars seemed swimming in a sort of milky steam, which same was old Manila's sweat evaporated. It was that sticky sort of heat that makes you want to yell or fight or else get drunk; but of course there wasn't any yelling or drinking either one for Martin or me that night, we being out to get Rounce good and plenty, and at last. Though I could see Martin's personal feelings about Rounce were still interfering a lot with his sense of duty in that direction.

Rounce—Rounce—sure, now you've got him. Used to be artillery captain and escaped a G. C. M. and a grand kick, with a few years of barred sunlight to meditate in, just by good nature or bad judgment of the examining board. Short in mess funds was the charge, with drunk on duty and A. W. O. L. added as minor embellishments. And allowed to resign! Lucky guy, I'll say. Eh? If he'd worn stripes instead of shoulder-straps. Say, he'd be wearing 'em yet, zebra brand.

And he took his resignation in the Islands. That tells you something, does it? Sure, a woman! Well, no, you could hardly call him *that*. She was a mestizo, and with not much more brown in her skin than the sun had put there. And a beauty, if you didn't notice how her eyes narrowed when she thought about dollars Mex. Probably Rounce never noticed it, being taken up with their Romance, which a man like him would naturally spell with a capital R. Well, she capitalized it too, so that's even.

Yes, I saw her often, and in line of duty too, because she stayed with him for some time after he resigned, and even after he took to signing chits, and dodging the unfortunates that accepted 'em for cash, and wearing linen that wasn't quite white. But don't put that down to woman's constancy. It wasn't that.

The fact is, a man's never broke as long as he's got something to sell; and she knew as well as Rounce that he had something that he could sell big. She knew it as well as the Government, and as well as Martin and me. You'll know something of it, too—though not all—when I tell you that Rounce spent the last six months of his service helping add to the heavy guns on Corregidor Island, which guards Manila and the bay.

But I suppose as the weeks went by with no incoming *dinero* she must have got tired of waiting, or else concluded he was straight on that one point—anyway, she flitted. Martin and I might have got tired and quit too, only it was our job to keep track of him as long as he was in the Islands; and besides, when Muller horned in on the game, interest revived immediately, so to speak.

Because Muller was one dangerous *hombre* that we had orders to run out of Uncle Sam's possessions if we could; he had a record up in China that wasn't sweet; and

although he changed his flag as often as he changed his name, it was dead sure he was doing spy's work for some Power or other. Dead sure, but not proved, and it was up to us to prove it so he could be deported.

Well, Muller began to court Rounce, with us shadowing the pair like jealous lovers, hoping we'd be in earshot when either of them began to talk turkey. Rounce's finances suffered an immediate temporary improvement—yes, suffered is the word—because of some monetary embarassments entered into with Muller when Rounce was more than half-drunk.

On account of all that, my work led me into pleasant pastures for a while—Timpke's and the Dutchman's and the Silver Dollar and many another place where the tall glasses matched my tall expense account. But Martin lost out on that fun, he not wanting to be seen by Rounce because of that personal foolish feeling I've already alluded to.

"You wouldn't either, Jack," he said, "if you'd seen him where I have. It would shame him too much if he recognized me—I don't want to do it. He was a first-class man among first-class men then, I'm telling you, and—oh, the ——, ain't there some way of saving him from doing this thing that Muller wants him to do, even now?"

"Well," says I, "you've taken an oath and so have I, and I guess that lets us out from any personal salvation work. If Rounce is the kind that can be bought, he knows too much to be running around loose, and the sooner he's caged the better. You can't go with him all his life and deliver him from temptation. Besides, by saving Rounce, we throw away our chance to get Muller, and that'd be dereliction of duty, and several other things."

"I suppose you're right," says he, "but I'd rather resign than have to run Rounce in. I would resign, if there was time. It's tough, when you've believed in a man—And when— Say, there's nothing I wouldn't do to help him, if things were different. And I could do a heap."

He could, at that, for Martin had a bit of money and more than a bit of pull, and was in this Secret Service work more for the excitement of the thing than anything else; but, as I told him, you can't help rotten eggs, and for that matter, every egg was a good egg once, and likely Rounce had been. Which set him cursing and declaring that Muller and I would both find ourselves mistaken in Rounce yet, but of course, he didn't hardly believe that himself.

WELL, as I was saying, tonight was to finish the story, for Muller had made an appointment to call on Rounce in his shack, and that meant private business was about to be transacted. But with Martin and me creeping like Tagalog thieves across the bamboo veranda, it looked like the business wouldn't be quite as private as was expected; and sure enough, we got to the conch shell shutters on the seaward side of the shack without making any noise at all, and found we had an almost perfect view of Rounce and Muller talking across the table.

Or rather, Muller was chuckling across it. He was a big man—big and fat and prosperous-looking as the Chinese God of Abundance, and when he laughed, he looked some like the Laughing Joss of Huk-Kuk, moon-face and all. Some different from Rounce, who was too fine-chiseled altogether, features and body and bones, just as his eyes were too big and brown and—romantic! Yes, that was what ailed 'em, I guess.

You may bet Rounce wasn't chuckling; fact is, his drawn face looked as if it'd never chuckle again; and as for his clothing and general appearance, he pretty well matched the room, with its tumbled bed in one corner, dirty kitchen gear in another and jug of *vino* under the washstand. But the next minute he was speaking sharp enough to Muller, with a kind of rasp in his nervous voice.

"Never mind that. You asked to see me alone, so I am alone, and the rest is nobody's business. Perhaps I may ask why you didn't come alone yourself."

By that time, I'd noticed a third party in the room, a Japanese house-servant of Muller's, sitting cross-legged in the farther corner.

"Oh, don't worry about him," said Muller. "He won't see or hear or think anything that I don't tell him to, but he sometimes comes in handy. Now, let's get down to business. What've you decided?"

"The same as I told you before. But you insisted——"

"Sure, I insisted," interrupted Muller in a way that told me he didn't believe Rounce any more than I did. "That's my business,

to insist. But I can't raise the ante. I gave you top-chop price right off, five thousand pesos for the plans of the Corregidor fortifications, and five thousand more for the design of——"

That's where I'll have to muffle a few words. Not that Muller knew enough to hurt—I didn't either, and don't yet—but even the scientific name for that thingumajig that Muller mentioned is best kept as secret as possible. I suppose it's all right to say, though, that any air-fleet attacking Corregidor or Manila will meet with a surprize party as long as—well, as long as it's kept a surprize.

But nobody ever invented anything yet that there wasn't a comeback to; and if Muller got what he was after, the guns on Corregidor and in Fort Santiago and on the battleships out on the bay—well they'd all be about as effective against bombing-plane attacks as a bunch of Moro cannon.

Martin and I hadn't suspected that Muller even knew that such an invention existed—we thought he was just after the location of the guns and the like—and believe me, I felt like thought-waving congratulations to Uncle Sam that we were on the job. Though Rounce did pull this line almost before Muller got through talking:

"And you think I'll tell that, for money! That I'll turn traitor."

There was a sort of reproachful anger in his voice.

But Muller just leaned forward and smiled more confidently than ever, and said in his purring, friendly voice:

"Sure, you will. 'Traitor'—say, boy, that's a word for fools. 'To thine own self be true'—that's the racket. Why, ——, Rounce, who do you owe any loyalty to?" He was getting more serious now. "Your country's cast you out! your friends have turned you down. Carmelita—well, of course—" He waved his fat hand. "Think of yourself. Get the money, and you can have your choice of countries, friends, Carmelitas too. Ten thousand, eh! Why, to a man like yourself, that ought to be just a start."

If you'll notice, there was a bunch of right clever argument lumped in that little speech, and a good opening for Rounce to begin damning people as an easy excuse for giving in, and I expected he'd take advantage of it. But instead, though his face kept twitching every now and then, and his hands kept fidgeting, and his general look showed me how he appreciated that ten thousand pesos that Muller was dangling in front of him, he managed to keep his eyes steady and contemplative-like when he looked Muller over and answered with an injudicious amount of contempt:

"I suppose you really don't understand what you're saying, Muller. To take the oath, and salute the flag, and fight for it, and see other men die for it—you simply don't get what that means, do you? If you did, you'd know you're wasting time. You'd know that I'd sooner——"

"No!" interrupted Muller, and all the friendship was gone from his voice now. "I don't, eh? Maybe you're right. But don't get up on moral stilts too soon, my embezzling friend. I've been telling you to think of yourself. I'm telling you now, there are two others to think of, if you're one-tenth part of a man."

"Two others! What do you mean?"

But Rounce's voice faltered and weakened; he knew what Muller meant all right; and I got the feeling that Muller had him at last.

"Why, your parents, of course. Your proud and honest New England parents. That's the way they grow back there, don't they? So —— straight they bend backward. Like their virtuous son, eh! Well, they've scratched the rocky soil for you all their lives, and lately they've scratched it some more to get the money to come out here and visit their only offspring, their officer boy. That meant so much to them, of course, his being an officer! And they don't know yet that he's been permitted to 'resign'—he didn't have the courage to tell 'em. And by the time he got their letter that they were coming, they'd already started, so he couldn't head 'em off."

"Muller——"

"And their transport's due tomorrow. That's why I'm here tonight. I got to thinking, it'll be a sad landing for them to find you out of the service and disgraced and become—well, what you are, and a little money might help. And on the other hand, I got to thinking it'll be a lot sadder for them if they found their beloved son in prison."

"In prison!"

By his looks, Rounce was being tortured all right; the old Inquisition stunts couldn't have been much worse; but I could tell that

he really didn't get the meaning of that last threat, yet.

"Yes, my boy. You signed a few I. O. U's for me, you know, and a few other papers, too. Maybe you don't remember—a check that's just come back, and another check that I haven't put through yet because I noticed that you made a mistake and endorsed it with Colonel Sampson's name. Well, we'll call 'em mistakes. You *were* drunk, you know. But with your record, the courts——"

"Muller, if that's true, you know —— well I was tricked. I did take some of the mess money, intending to pay it back. And since then I've been a fool and a drunkard and a bum, but, by ——, I'm no thief. I gave you my I. O. U's and I wish I'd starved first; but if I signed anything else, it's because I took your word for it that they were I. O. U's. And if Colonel Sampson's name is on any of my paper, it wasn't I that forged it. You can't—you daren't——"

"Unfortunately—or maybe fortunately—I've already done it," Muller came back. "The evidence is in suitable hands, and if I can't report within an hour that you'll do what I ask, you'll be in a cell before morning. But, pshaw, that's not going to happen, of course. Let's talk about something pleasanter.

"For instance—" and Muller's voice again took on a note of oily friendliness—"let's talk about what the money's going to mean to you—what you'll tell your parents. You'll have made a lucky speculation—say in rice futures—and you've resigned to go into business in the Islands. You've kept it secret for a happy surprize. And you can actually do it and make a go of it—you've brains enough. Why, you should be thanking me and fate for bringing you such a chance, instead of sitting there looking as though you were going to be hanged."

It's a fact that Rounce did look just about like that. I was beginning to think perhaps I'd misjudged him a bit, and that there was maybe some excuse for Martin's pity and friendship for him—it must have been pretty hard, all this time we listened, for Martin to keep from busting up the game—but I still hadn't any doubts about what he'd do. What could he do, being the weakling he'd proved himself, and with them screws upon him? Really, I thought Muller needn't have gone to quite so much trouble to cinch a man like Rounce, but I guess the infernal spy knew his business after all.

By this time, Rounce had got out of his chair and was moving around aimlessly, with head and shoulders and chest all slumped down as it were, but with eyes burning like a fever. Muller watched him, pretty confident, just waiting for Rounce's weak will to cave in again, like it had done before. Just before Muller got his wish, a curious thing happened.

Rounce's eyes seemed to be caught by something on the wall a little outside my line of sight; and he stopped and stared at it for about ten seconds, drawing himself up like a soldier at attention. Maybe it was the different angle of the lamplight that made his face seem to change and harden and sort of glow—anyway, he took another slump right away, and stood and thought for a bit, and then turned to Muller.

"Well, I suppose—" he hesitated.

AFTER that, it was naturally soon over. Ten minutes later Muller was leaving, and to judge from his face he was already adding up his profits from the resale of the two sets of plans. And five minutes more saw Martin and me squatting down behind a heap of split bamboo across the street, where the gugus were building a house.

"Did you hear what I did?" whispered Martin. "That he's to draw the plans and deliver them in the morning?"

"To the Jap, yes. And the Jap's to take them to Muller."

"And the Jap's to stay there all night and see that he sticks to his job. Well, here's where we stick to ours, then. But—lord, old man, I hate to think of what we'll have to do in the morning."

"We're getting Muller," said I, "and that's the big thing, and what the ——'s the use of thinking about the rest."

That's what I told myself, too, and I didn't think about it—not much! Martin might choke his running gear up with sentiment, but not I. It was a cruel trap Rounce was in, but he'd woven the net himself with his own weak foolishness. The queer drinks were no excuse, nor the loneliness of Corregidor, nor the silly spell of tropical romance—bah, for that! And what if fine silk does go to pieces out here, while coarser cloth stands up? What had that to do with men? Or with Rounce?

No, I didn't let Rounce's plight trouble

me any; it was the heat that kept me uncomfortable. You know how it is on those hot nights, the old earth just seems to breath out heat, and you think when the sun comes it'll be a relief. But of course, it's worse.

Nothing happened all night, except now and then the *slip-slap* of a native's feet or the rattling of a *carramata* passing by. The shacks around us were dark and silent, and it was the same way clear down to the water-front. Out on the bay we could see the ships' lights, and the light in Rounce's window went on burning, and that was all.

Martin and I knew the way the Jap would have to take to get to Muller's house, and just before morning we moved over in that direction and waited on the first corner while the sun came up all white-hot and sizzling out of the bay.

The crooked old streets filled up mighty *pronto* after that—*muchachas* and wash-people, haughty, white-collared clerks with *mucha grande* tan shoes, women in bright-colored *camisas*, naked children, and pretty nearly naked *cargadores*—and say, them last were handsome as statues, with their smooth, gleaming muscles.

But all the rest of 'em I'd have swapped for a sack of makin's, particularly the stand-offish clerks. Their talk was monkey's gibberish to me this morning, and their thoughts were monkeys' thoughts, and their whole archipelago seemed a pity 'twas ever created, and—I guess I was feeling done up.

Well, Martin and I waited and waited, keeping an eye on Rounce's shack; and at about eight o'clock the Jap came out, and turned up the street as we'd expected. I won't delay any over our encounter with him, except to remark that he showed signs of considerable excitement when we grabbed him. Sometimes they do, you know.

We found a big, fat envelope inside his blouse—*the* envelope, we knew, because it had just been sealed. Martin pocketed it, and then, after we'd made sure that nothing else was on him that mattered, we turned the Jap over to a big Met policeman who'd appeared in the offing. We gave the policeman a letter to our chief, too, so no time would be lost in placing Muller under arrest.

Then we hailed a *carramata* and started back to get the other man. For, of course, that's all Rounce was by now—just the lowest-down party to an infernal treasonous conspiracy.

So I couldn't see why Martin should look so downhearted and discouraged, as if all his faith in humanity had been busted to pieces before his eyes. If he hadn't kept those eyes so darn downcast, if he'd lifted 'em and looked up to where the Pacific Fleet lay at anchor on the bay, it might have consoled him, I thought. The line of ships looked very near in the morning light, with toy men all in white moving about on the decks, and a toy Marine guard gathering aft on each one of them for Colors.

Away out, the old rock Corregidor guarded the entrance like a sentinel—well, Colors would soon be sounding there, too, while everyone within hearing gave his little daily pledge of loyalty. And it might be that we'd saved all this from destruction, and Manila too, and thousands of lives.

I started to say something like that to Martin, and then I held my tongue. No use ringing in anything military; it would only make him feel worse; for when he and Rounce had made friends, they'd both been part of it. Part of the military, I mean, in the great, big scrap. That was all Martin ever told me, that they'd met in France. Seemed to think 'twas enough.

Oh, well, we went on. And I remember, when we got out of the *carramata* in front of Rounce's shack, we could hear the bugles on the fleet begin "sounding off"—just the faintest sound.

We tiptoed, just about as quietly as we had last night, up the littered walk and the bamboo steps and across the veranda. It wasn't the window that we went to this time, but the door, and I mind, as I opened it, half-lifting my gun from my pocket. And then I stopped, and I guess my breath stopped too, from amazement.

Rounce was there, but he hadn't heard us. He was standing with his back toward us, facing the window through which Martin and I had done our spying. You'll remember that window opened upon the bay and the fleet and Corregidor. Well, Colors had begun to sound upon that fleet, and the flags were running up, and—can you guess it?

As if he was back in the uniform he'd disgraced, Rounce was standing at attention, at a perfect salute. Only he'd added this to the drill manual; in his left hand he held a heavy Army revolver, and he was

bringing it slowly up so that at the last note of Colors, the muzzle would be right close to his head.

Well! That's just what I thought for a minute, absolutely nothing, my mind went blank. Then I got a giddy idea that he must have learned we were coming to arrest him—but why not a getaway, then? And why the salute? And then I happened to notice a tiny American flag pinned to the wall just where his eyes had rested when that queer change had come to him last night.

But even then I didn't begin to understand until I glanced around at Martin. Say, his eyes were that bright with hope that they dazzled me. Of course, he wasn't sure, he couldn't be until—but he was certain enough of Rounce's innocence that he gestured me to save him.

I understood why he left it for me to do—*he* wanted to see what was in the envelope before he palavered with Rounce. Well, I'd have liked that, too. But I was sure enough what was in the envelope—or rather, what wasn't in it—that when I leaped forward to drag Rounce's wrist down, a sort of pity for him came to me, and a desire to spare him shame, and I rasped out, as if to Martin:

"It's the heat. It's the —— heat that's to blame."

The revolver went off once, but didn't do any harm. While Rounce and I struggled over it—he was a considerably lighter man than I am—I managed to get a few intermittent glimpses of Martin. He was going over the papers in a rush, and the way he was looking, I knew everything was as I'd thought. So when I managed to make Rounce see the foolishness of fighting, I held him by the shoulder for a moment and looked straight into his eyes.

"Whether it was the heat or not," said I, "there's a lot that needn't be reported. Every thing's all right, d'ye get me? Except that we owe you a heap, and the Government does, too, for helping get the goods on Muller—and here's a man coming that seems to think he owes you for something else."

It was Martin, of course, and I'd swapped my prisoner for the papers in a hurry, and turned my back on the two. But there wasn't much to their greeting, just a few words, a handshake, I guess—Martin never was much of a talker, and it wasn't a time to talk. So I don't know yet what brought them together so strong in France, and I suppose there's no need of knowing.

And I guess that's about all, except—Oh, the papers? Of course the drawings on them were about as valuable as so many hens' tracks, though they did look some like the plans of fortifications—Rounce's little joke on Muller. And then he had to keep the Jap satisfied during the night, so he'd be sure to be free at Colors.

Free to die at Colors, in salute to the flag that he'd fought for, and disgraced, and been tempted to betray. H-m!

Sentimental? Oh, ——, yes, and plumb foolish besides. A romantic geezer, as I've said. What the heck difference would it make to the flag, I ask you? But it made something of a hit with a few people Martin told it to in confidence, and Rounce is climbing the ladder again under that same flag.

"MADAME MUSTACHE"

by Frank H. Huston

ONE of the famous and mysterious characters who thronged the streets of Deadwood in the Black Hills in the latter seventies was a fine-looking, plump little Frenchwoman of about forty years, called Madame Mustache, from a dainty little hirsute adornment gracing her upper lip.

For fifteen years she had followed the railway and mining camps conducting gambling houses "on her own," dealing her own game, handling the faro box like a veteran and maintaining "order" (as it was known) in every establishment she owned. Nothing was known of her antecedents except that she was of a degree of culture superior to her environment and was a good sport and a square dealer.

THE LONG KNIVES

A FIVE-PART STORY PART IV

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Old Misery," "Red Autumn," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IN JUNE of 1793 I was returning from Canada, where in the rôle of a deserter from the American Army I had learned much of value to General "Mad Anthony" Wayne concerning British dealings with the Indians. Reaching Virginia, I crossed to the forks of the Ohio by way of the "Bloody Road." As I strode along the forest path, checkered by light and shade from the overhanging forest trees, I recollected the tragic history of that trail. There the red death had skulked upon the footsteps of settlers, and there the armies of Burgoyne and St. Clair had been annihilated by arrow and tomahawk. I prayed that Wayne's army—the army of the "Long Knives," as the Americans were called by the Indians—would not meet a similar fate in the coming campaign.

At this time Mad Anthony Wayne was at Cincinnati. To join him I stopped at Pittsburg and took the boat down the Ohio. On the boat with me were a number of Yankee immigrants, among them an odd combination of innocence, genius and bravery named Hate-Evil Durgin. His peculiarities repelled his fellow-travelers and attracted me; we drifted into acquaintance. I told him my name—Peter Watson; my business—spy for Mad Anthony; and my mission—to rejoin the Army and to learn something on the way of a white renegade named Quain, one of a group of whites, including the Girtys and Black Dorman, who were red men at heart.

"Hate" Durgin refused to be cowed by the prospect of meeting these men.

"I won't turn tail to anything short of the ——," he said. "And that ain't bragging neither. The Durgins don't brag."

I looked at him calculatingly. He might be scatter-brained and a dreamer, I decided, but he was too stubborn of soul to give ground before anything that walked on legs.

So at Marietta, Ohio, when I left the boat and continued my way by canoe, I was not displeased that Durgin should have decided to leave the immigrants and to throw in his lot with me. He seemed to think that in the Army he might have leisure to work out some of the inventions he had in mind. We paddled down the river together.

Some thirteen miles down, Durgin was exhausted and insisted on landing. I complied, for I needed sleep. We climbed the hill by an ancient path which led us at length to a solitary cabin. The occupant proved to be a powerful man with a white beard, at first suspicious but finally willing to let us stay for the night.

As we talked together before the roaring fire, which he strangely insisted on keeping up despite the Summer weather, I asked him Quain's whereabouts.

"I may have heard the name, but I don't remember it," he pondered.

And then in answer to our questions he said that the huge fire was for his rheumatism's sake. When he stepped into the back room, however, I thrust a poker into the embers and raked out four buttons and some fragments of smoldering cloth. Our host had been burning garments. Then we heard men coming up the path.

"We must clear out," I whispered.

"Through the back room," Durgin agreed. "That feller must 'a' left the house that way."

As we lifted the buffalo-robe curtain and went in we discovered that a man had been murdered. His naked body lay in the bunk, and the bloody knife was stuck in the wall.

In horror we ran out toward the river. We heard the bearded man behind us calling to the other men. They hailed him by name. He was Quain!

Durgin halted pursuit for an instant by hurling an ax at the leader. but soon they were after us. We gained our canoe barely in time and flashed down the river ahead of them.

Some miles down we found an ally in Old Podge, a veteran hunter of the region, who forced us at the

"*The Long Knives*," *copyright*, 1923, *by Hugh Pendexter.*

muzzle of his rifle to take him on board. At first I did not welcome him, but later when he had helped Durgin and me to repulse Quain's party I realized that he was of great assistance to us, although he was obsessed with the idea that White Tom, a Delaware whose son he had killed, was on his trail. Quain bothered us no more on the journey. I hoped that one of our bullets had put him out of the world. Still farther down the river the Night Walker, the leader of Wayne's Chickasaw scouts, joined us.

With little more trouble we came to Cincinnati. There Durgin, after a fight with Ogden, a sergeant who made sport of his Yankee peculiarities, joined Wayne's army. As a result of the fight General Wayne gave orders that no more men be allowed outside of camp without passes.

I reported to the general and told him what I had learned of British and Indian plans. Wayne agreed with me that Alexander McKee, the British Indian agent, was the stimulator of all the trouble between Indians and whites. When my report was over General Wayne thanked me. Then he drummed his fingers softly on the table and asked—

"You would volunteer to go back if it were considered a military necessity?"

I thought of the dangers I had just been through I shrank from the nervous strain of another Winter among the English and remembered the ignominious fate of a spy. But I answered—

"I am ready at any time, sir."

My heart was heavy as I passed from the hut and walked to the outskirts of the camp to be alone while I thought it over.

I HAD not been long in camp before one Hodgecomb, a recent recruit, was branded for desertion. He was about to be drummed out of camp when I recognized him as Quain. He was thereupon held for hanging as a spy. Quain escaped, however, and fled to the north. I suspected that Ogden, who was his guard that night, could have told how the escape had been effected.

I expected to be detailed to hunt for him; but instead General Posey, the post commander, asked me to go on a quite different mission.

"Can you win north to Detroit over the Bloody Way, Watson?" he inquired.

The dreaded request, foreshadowed by General Wayne's question, had been made; again I must venture into the heart of hostile Indian and British territory as a spy.

"Our commissioners are treating with the Indians there," Posey went on. "If they can not arrange a peace, if war is to come, we must know at once. The War Department has arranged for messengers, but General Wayne will feel more secure if in addition to them he has one of his own scouts fetching the word. You are not detailed for this work, you understand."

"I volunteer," I told him.

And so it was arranged.

As an incidental mission I planned the death of a hostile Indian who had been lurking about camp, murdering our soldiers. It was necessary to "get" him, for he was disguised with the yellow ribbon which was the insignia of our own Chickasaw and Choctaw scouts, with the natural result that the soldiers suspected treachery on the part of their allies. The Night Walker as leader of the Chickasaws accordingly announced that he would go with me to lend his aid in wiping out the suspicion which rested on his men. Durgin and Podge were my other two companions.

It was decided that I was to leave camp alone in the guise of a deserter, for such was to be my rôle when I finally came to the Shawnee country and to Detroit. A short distance out I met the Night Walker, who painted and dressed me in the Indian fashion.

Then we separated to search for the hostile. It was my luck to come upon him and kill him by a stratagem, much to the Night Walker's disappointment. The latter took the dead man's head back to camp to prove that it was a Miami, not a Chickasaw, who had committed the murders, and returned with Podge. Like myself Podge was stripped and painted Indian fashion; but his purpose in assuming the disguise was to delude White Tom, the Delaware, who he thought was still on his trail. Podge said that Durgin had quarreled with him and was gone off by himself. That bit of information worried me, for Durgin was no woodsman.

We three traveled on toward the north and Detroit. At the Auglaize the Night Walker unexpectedly declared that a dream had warned him to go no farther.

"Two will make four," was his enigmatic statement. "If one dies the voice may send the Night Walker to make four."

WE HAD gone only a few miles farther when we were captured by a party of Shawnees, who had already made prisoners of Durgin and a young pioneer woman named Liz Pleiss.

"Oh, Lawd! The Chickasaw had the right of it!" cried Old Podge. "Two's become four. That means we're dished."

Spotted Snake, the leader of the Shawnees, condemned us to the stake, and his young men commenced painting us black in preparation for the burning. Just then Simon Girty the renegade approached. We recognized him by the scar on his forehead. He halted before Old Podge, wrinkled his brows and said:

"You make me think of somebody. What's your name?"

"Simpson," muttered my friend, greatly fearing to be recognized as the man who had booted Girty years before.

I succeeded in persuading Girty to intercede on our behalf; and at last the death signs were washed off us and the march was resumed.

At the junction of the Maumee and Auglaize we came to eight stout cabins occupied by Indian traders operating under the British flag—George Ironside, Pirault, McKenzie, Elliott, Simon Girty's brother James, and McKee the British Indian agent. Here Spotted Snake sold Mrs. Pleiss to James Girty as a servant for James' wife, the Indian woman Shawnee Betsy.

Across the river was a Shawnee village of some sixty houses, of which the great leader Blue Jacket, or Weyapiersenwah, was the chief. On entering the village Spotted Snake took us to the river side of the settlement and placed us in a stout ten-by-ten cabin under guard. On the other bank we could see a Delaware village of eighteen houses, which Old Podge was sure sheltered his enemy White Tom. He hardly knew which to dread more—the possibility of the Indian's vengeance, or of Girty's.

Durgin made friends with the Indian boys by turning his mechanical ingenuity to constructing

arrows and slings. At his request they brought him some seasoned ash, out of which he promised to make them something that would surprize them. With this he made a powerful cross-bow for himself and for the boys some air-sailing darts. To test the cross-bow he sent a bolt over the Delaware village and then hid the weapon.

The flight of the whizzing bolt, far faster than any arrow, quickly became a topic for animated discussion. Spotted Snake asserted that it was his medicine flying over the village.

"It was Spotted Snake's medicine voice," he declared. "It will talk very soon about two white men. The voice will soon call us to the east and south. Where it leads, Weyapiersenwah's children the Shawnees and their grandfathers the Delawares will burn and kill."

James Girty shrewdly utilized the incident as the text for a discourse to divert the Snake's thought from his prisoners and to encourage the Indians to believe that it was a portent forecasting a widespread destruction of the white race.

"Blue Jacket wanted me to do what I could to help you two," he explained later to Old Podge and me. "He's a smart Injun. Minute he heard the medicine talk he knew it meant the stake or Detroit for you. McKee ain't here now, but when he comes back Blue Jacket knows he'll want to take you to Detroit to be questioned by Colonel Richard England, commandant. The Yankee will stay here. He ain't in any danger."

Then, as he was totally illiterate, he asked us to read him "a piece of writing." It was from Quain, telling of his adventures in the American army and asking whether he should report to McKee on the Maumee or at Detroit.

IF QUAIN, with the livid "D" on his forehead, had suddenly confronted me I could not have been more taken aback. By a great effort—and the gathering dusk helped me—I suppressed any telltale signs of emotion, yet my fear was as great as if the man had been in the village instead of in the Wyandot town on the Sandusky where Tarhe of the Porcupine clan of the Wyandots made his headquarters.

"Don't see why the —— fool didn't come here instead of going to the Sandusky," grumbled Girty. "If the road's open to Tarhe's town, then it's open to up here. You fellers made the Maumee all right. And why didn't he send on a report for me to send to McKee by runner? Looks like he's afraid some one else will git some credit." Then suspiciously, "Sure you read it all?"

"Each word as written. If you have any doubts have one of Blue Jacket's sons read it. Their English education should permit them to do that."

"Aye! Let one of 'em look it over and git the notion he measures up higher'n a white man," growled Girty. "That's the wrong belt to hand to me."

"I only meant you could easily check up my reading of it. Ironside or Elliott across the river will tell you I've read it correctly. Or McKenzie, the Scotchman."

He was resenting my reference to the proficiency of Blue Jacket's sons although his own confessed ignorance had occasioned it.

"No need of all that bother," he surlily replied. "Here, you —— Yankee inside there! Come out here and read this paper for me."

Durgin did so, repeating my words. Satisfied, Girty produced paper, a horn of ink and a quill and directed me to be seated in the doorway and write as he talked. The message I penned read:

To Quain at Tarhe's town on the Sandusky.

Start for Blue Jacket's village as soon as possible. Col. McKee will be here before you can make Detroit. If not able to travel send your report here for McKee. Do not tell Tarhe, or his men, that the army is well drilled. That is a poor bag of talk to open in any red village.

his
Simon X Girty.
mark

After I had written it and he had made his mark he had Durgin read it aloud. As he waved it back and forth to dry he remarked:

"Quain's messenger hasn't the hang of reading and writing much better'n me. He's over to McKee's place drinking rum. When he crosses I'll have you talk with him. You must know him. He quit the army 'bout the same time you did. His name's Ogden."

It seemed as if I could feel the flames licking my feet and the hot coals being poured over my shoulders. There was the terrible suspicion that Girty had received our true history from the deserter and was playing with us. Forcing my voice to calmness, I answered:

"I think I remember him. Got himself into some trouble and was reduced to the ranks. May be getting him mixed with some one else. Does he remember us?"

"Don't know you're here. Pretty well beat out when he come. The Wyandot showing him the way kept him traveling hard. And he was in such a mortal rush to git some rum he stopped at the Point,

and I had to cross over to get Quain's talk. If he's sober enough we'll all git together tonight and have a powwow. I'll ask the Snake to let you have the freedom of the village."

He stepped one side and talked with the Snake; then walked away without looking at us. We had no idea as to the outcome of his talk until the Snake came to the door and announced:

"The white men can go as far as the river. They will not cross to the white cabins on the Point."

Then he left us after telling the guards they were free to go where they would. Durgin clutched my arm and drew me to where Old Podge was seated with a blanket over his head.

"How'n sin be we to get out of this mess? Just as soon as it gets a bit darker we must run for it," he cried.

"If we run for it that spoils our business, and we can only turn back and try to make Cincinnati."

"If we stay here we'll surely be roasted."

"You and Podge try for the Ohio. I'll try for Detroit."

"The minute that feller sees us he'll remember the fuss him and me had, and he'll be a caution in denouncing us," warned Durgin.

"My business is with the American commissioners at the mouth of the Detroit River if they've not already made Detroit," I persisted. "If we can make Detroit or Canada we'll be safe from the Indians. The United States and England aren't at war yet."

"Then I vote for Detroit," said Durgin.

Old Podge groaned beneath his blanket and lamented:

"If I budge outside this cabin White Tom's bound to see me and know me. I'd rather risk the stake than that."

We tried to reason with him, but his mind was incapable of entertaining any thought except the one: White Tom's vengeance was hovering over him. He must remain hidden, or endure the cunning tortures of the Delaware. Durgin lost all patience and growled:

"Then stay here and be roasted, but I sha'n't keep you company. I'm going to make a break for it with Mister Watson. Better die in the open, fighting, than to have these Shawnee ——s take a vote on how they'll cook us. Wish that cuss would be drowned when he crosses to this shore. Wish he'd drink so much rum he'd die before he could open his yawp."

"If he died suddenly it would help us immensely. If he died before talking we'd be in no danger," I gloomily admitted.

"If he died—" muttered Durgin. "A man's years are three score 'n' ten—but not always. Yes, Mister Watson, it would help a heap. Let's git out of this stuffy hole. Wish a bolt from my bow-gun was through his mis'rable carcass."

"Wouldn't help much. They'd all know it wasn't any Indian arrow that killed him. That would fasten it on to us—probably on to you, as they think you have some magic."

"Uhuh. Oughter be a Injun arrer, of course. Well, s'pose we take a walk round the village. Always like to meet things in the open."

"I don't budge from this cabin," Old Podge informed us. "White Tom is close by. I can feel him. But he's got to come the whole distance to find me."

We tried to talk him out of his sick frame of mind, but the possibility of meeting the Delaware had blinded him to the certainty of exposure once we met Ogden, the deserter. We had to leave, and our last words to him were for him to be ready to join us in attempting an escape that night.

Durgin wore a long blanket after the Indian fashion, but there was no use in attempting concealment once Ogden's tongue began to wag. If we were prevented from escaping down the river we must outface our accuser and lie our best. No matter how I viewed the situation, however, I could discern only defeat. Did we manage to escape we would be branding ourselves as spies; and my business at Detroit would be spoiled.

Did we gain that settlement I did not believe we would be surrendered to the Indians, but surely we would be prevented from acting as Wayne's special messengers. I would not return to the army and confess failure unless it was the only way of saving my life. Never once while journeying north had I foreseen the chance of Quain's turning up to denounce me; even more remote was the thought of Ogden deserting and penetrating to Blue Jacket's village.

However, I should have been on my guard against Quain. I should have known that his flight to Kentucky was merely an expedient to cover his trail and gain a safe

lead. He would never be safe south of the Ohio, and I might have known he must make for the Maumee or the Sandusky. Regrets were useless, and I endeavored to find some solid footing in the situation that existed.

No attention was paid to us as we strolled about the village. Durgin forgot our peril enough to display his usual Yankee curiosity regarding Indian customs, especially those concerning their domestic life. While I was fearing our lives were as good as forfeited he would persist in asking questions, such as—

"When you want to visit an Injun neighbor do you have to get acquainted first?"

"You can enter any of their lodges without hurting their feelings."

"Don't you have to knock as you would at a white house?"

"They would think you were crazy."

"Uhuh. Just walk right in as if you owned the place, eh? Always like to know. Ain't that the head Injun, Blue Jacket, coming out that hut?"

I told him it was the chief. Blue Jacket passed within a rod of us, followed by his two sons. He affected not to see us, which I took to be a bad sign, but his sons eyed us curiously. When we were opposite the big lodge Durgin halted and stared inside. Before I could guess his intention he had entered and was gazing about with keen interest. There was nothing for me to do but follow him.

He seemed to be amazed at the decorations and furnishings. One of the comely daughters offered us water, and another brought a platter of deer-meat and some vegetables. Durgin partook of both heartily although we had recently eaten. I made a pretense of eating to comply with red etiquette and whispered for Durgin to have done and leave the place. He smiled genially and continued bolting meat like a glutton. The women folks gave us no further heed, and Durgin continued eating until he had cleaned the platter.

With a deep sigh of satisfaction he rose from the mat and proceeded leisurely to admire the furnishings. The place was hung and spread with skins of the otter, the deer, bear and loupcervier. There were many blankets and expensive dress goods. On the walls hung several rifles, war-clubs, a dozen or more bows and many quivers filled with arrows. Despite the English gifts lavished on the chief and his family the tone of the lodge was Indian.

"Will you come along?" I rasped at him in exasperation.

"Just wanted to see what sort of truck the chief has," he explained, drawing his blanket about him.

Then he turned and bade mother and daughters a polite, "Good evening." Once outside, with the night thickening, he urged—

"Now let's go down and take a peek at the river—the place where they cross over from the Point."

"That's where you see the fire burning. It's a good place to meet Ogden and have it over with," I grimly replied.

But he was not frightened at the prospect of meeting the deserter. In fact, he seemed eager to visit the fire where a dozen

warriors were lounging and smoking their adulterated tobacco. As we strolled toward the fire Durgin slowed his pace and finally came to a halt. I supposed he was thinking better of his proposition. A short distance from the fire on the up-stream side was a clump of trees.

"If we was behind those trees we could see and not be seen," muttered Durgin.

"There's nothing to see." I told him. "There's nothing to hear——"

Ah, but there was! However, we did not need to hide behind the trees to listen. All too well did our ears catch the sound of a white man singing on the opposite shore. The river mirrored the dancing flames. The voice grew louder as the singer began

the crossing, and a dark object entering the fire reflections became a canoe. Now we were catching the words of the song, shouted in a drunken voice, and recognized them to be from the gruesome ballad of "St. Clair's Defeat."

"We had not been long broken when General Butler found
Himself so badly wounded, was forced to quit the ground.
'My God,' says he, 'what shall we do; we're wounded every man——' "

"Shut up that —— squalling," harshly commanded Simon Girty's voice. "Want the Injuns to think white men are fools?"

"No hurt to sing a song," defended the singer, his tones blurred from strong drink.

"You're drunk," Girty reminded him.

"Ain't so drunk but what I know something that'll s'prize you."

And the speaker laughed loudly.

"Bah! You started talking that way to Jim. I don't like this mystery talk. You're nothing but Quain's messenger."

"That's what you say."

And there was more of the empty laughter.

"Mister, I ain't so drunk on McKee's rum but what I know I'm mortal keen to see them white prisoners you talked about."

"What about them prisoners?" fiercely demanded Girty.

"Can't hurry me any," retorted Ogden. "I've been laughing my insides out ever since you crossed over to your brother's place and began talking about 'em. We'll find your big Injun chief and go and have a talk with 'em. Then mebbe you'll think I'm more'n Quain's messenger. Quain thinks I'm more'n that. If it hadn't been for me he'd 'a' straightened out a rope before now. Ask Quain."

We had until Ogden reached our cabin in which to attempt to escape. I turned to urge Durgin to make a break up the river while I went back and aroused Old Podge to take the same direction. My own flight must be down the river and toward Detroit. Only the humor of a drunken man had prevented Girty from learning the truth and confronting us with it.

Durgin had disappeared. I was nonplused. If left alone he would be recaptured immediately. He was not situated as were Podge and I. However, Ogden would be keen to pay him off for the drubbing received in front of Creigh's store; but Girty would not permit the working out of any private grudge. Both the renegade and Spotted Snake had taken a fancy to him. Decidedly my duty lay in the direction of the cabin, where Podge was waiting to be rescued. As I reached this decision several Indians, attracted by the singing and the loud voices of the white men, closed in behind me and blocked any precipitate withdrawal. Already the canoe was grounding against the bank.

WITH no gentle hand Girty grabbed Ogden by the shoulder and dragged him up the bank.

"You'll make good about this mystery talk, or find yourself in a heap of trouble," threatened the renegade. "You're drunk and don't have much idea what you're saying. We'll sober you off mighty quick."

As he talked he pulled the fellow close to the fire. Rocking forward and backward and grinning at the stolid-faced warriors, Ogden cried:

"That so? Just tell your Injun friends I'm a man that don't forgit a bad turn. Just tell 'em to foller along behind us. Just hunt up your big Injun chief. I ain't said I know anything about a man called Simpson. Never heard of *him*. But you show me this Mister Watson and this Mister Durgin, and have 'em look me in the eye, and then watch 'em. We'll hunt up the big Injun chief and have another snort of rum, and I'll be primed for a big talk.

"We had not been long broken when General Butler found——"

I caught the *twang* of a bowstring, and Ogden broke off his song to make a horrid, gasping cry. Before any one could move he had spun around, clawing at his throat, and fell to a sitting posture. Not until I saw the red patch on each side of his neck, the blood pumping through both, did I realize that the man had received his death wound. Not until his head sagged forward did the Indians and Girty recover from their amazement.

"—— and ——!" shrieked Girty. "Someone's killed him!"

The warriors behind me rushed forward, carrying me before them. Ogden was gasping his last when we halted at the fire. The men stared stupidly at the limp form. It was Girty who turned him over

to show the red wound was duplicated on the right side of the neck.

"Some one shot an arrer plumb through his neck and busted the big vein!" howled the infuriated renegade.

"What does this all mean?" I gasped. "Has some one killed the messenger?"

"Land sakes! The poor feller's bled to death!" exclaimed Durgin's voice at my shoulder.

The Indians had caught the significance of the two wounds and the direction from which the arrow must have come. Some ran to the clump of trees to find the slayer; others scattered down the bank to find the mortal weapon.

"You white men stay here!" thundered Girty.

To the warriors who had arrived with me he cried in Shawnee—

"See they don't leave this fire."

"We don't want to stay here in the light," objected Durgin. "One white man's been killed already. Your Injuns will be killing us next."

"Do as I say, you —— Yankee, or my ax'll save the Injuns the bother," Girty passionately warned us.

He glared about like one possessed by demons; then he kicked the limp body and gritted out:

"You drunken dog! Couldn't talk to Simon Girty! Wouldn't tell what you claimed to know. And now you've taken your little bag of mystery talk to —— with you!"

By this time warriors were streaming from the village to the river. From down the river-bank came the sharp yelp of discovery. The men up-stream and in the clump of trees called out that they could find nothing, and one returned to get a blazing fagot so that they might search the ground for signs. I stole a glance at Durgin's solemn face, and it seemed as if his left eye contracted a trifle.

"They'll know when they find the bolt," I softly whispered.

He slowly shook his head, and his tightly pressed lips twitched as if he were fighting back a smile. The man was incomprehensible. The warrior down the bank came running back to the fire just as Blue Jacket and his two sons arrived on the scene. The man was brandishing a long war-arrow. Blue Jacket spoke sharply. The man turned from Girty, who was holding out his hand, and presented the arrow to the chief.

Blue Jacket took it and turned it over and over and grunted softly. Then he said:

"This is a Shawnee arrow. Who of my children has done this bad thing?"

Girty, fairly beside himself with rage, loudly cried: "The dead man said he had a bag of talk for the ears of Weyapiersenwah. He would not tell me what it was. Now Weyapiersenwah will never know what was in the bag."

The chief stared at him coldly; for despite popular border beliefs Girty at no time held any rank with the Indians. He was the crown's interpreter and went with war-parties when the crown's business did not require his presence at Detroit. From the outset of his career as renegade, when he was sent to the Mingoes by Hamilton, "the hair buyer," down to the time when he was sent by De Peyster to live with the Wyandots on the Upper Sandusky, he was acting under orders of the different Indian agents.

His brother James, closely affiliated with the Shawnees for years, had more influence with that nation than did Simon. Simon was thoroughly trusted by the savages, but at no time was he permitted to exercise any unusual authority. Blue Jacket resented being interrupted once he had taken a situation in hand. Calling the warriors present by name, he rapidly secured what information each could furnish.

Those by the fire, who had listened to the maudlin boasts of the dead man, could only say they had heard the twang of a bow-string and had seen the victim fall and die. The others testified they were standing close behind me when the white man whirled about and fell. Big Bear was the last to speak, and he made my heart light when he said—

"When the man was killed we ran forward to the fire, the two white men with us."

I dared not glance at Durgin, for I could scarcely credit our good luck. I knew from the first that the arrival of the savages had established my innocence, but I had not dared to hope that my friend could slip among them unnoticed while their attention was absorbed by the tragedy. Then came the fear that the mortal weapon would be discovered: for now I realized Durgin had worn the blanket to conceal the bow-gun. And I had a shrewd suspicion as to the source of the arrow.

When I did venture to glance at him my gaze rested on the blanket. He threw it aside as if finding it too hot. As fast as I was assured of one thing I became fearful of another. Each second I expected some one to yell and bring forward the bow-gun. Not being an Indian weapon, it would be attributed to a white man; and Durgin already had attracted attention to himself by his use of a sling and his promise to make other novelties for offensive warfare.

Blue Jacket said:

"Some man has done a very bad thing. He has stopped the mouth that was bringing us a strong talk. He has sewed up the bag of talk so it can never be opened. The man who shot this arrow has listened to a bad voice. The dead man was not a prisoner. He was a runner between this village and Tarhe's village. He carried the road-belt of the Crane. It smoothed his road from the Upper Sandusky to the village of Blue Jacket on the Maumee. Then he was killed. Let the man who killed him hold his fingers to his ears. Let him listen no more to bad voices. There are many white men to be killed. They are on the Ohio. They will come up here, and we will kill them as we killed the men Harmar and Sinclair brought to fight us."

He turned away and motioned for Girty to accompany him. The latter ordered us to trail behind him.

"The white man did not open his bag of talk a little way?" the chief asked the renegade.

"He was drunk, Weyapiersenwah. He would not open his bag of talk. He said he would open it for you. It was something about the two white men behind us. Now I must find another runner to take my talk to Tarhe's town."

"Bad medicine is working in the village," said the chief.

CHAPTER VII

A WHITE MAN DIES BRAVELY

THE cabin was under guard that night, but in the morning, while we were cooking the kettle Spotted Snake had sent us, Big Bear came along and spoke briefly to the guards, who grunted as if well-pleased and walked away. Old Podge thrust his wobegone face from the doorway and muttered—

"Now what do they mean by calling off the sentinels?"

"We're to have the freedom of the village," I answered. "They feel sure of us."

"They ain't to keep watch on us any more? Then we can cut and run for it," eagerly suggested Durgin.

"And be feathered with half a dozen arrows before you could get half a mile from this village," I warned him. "I'll wait here for McKee to come and give us road-belts to Detroit."

"What if Quain comes before McKee does? I can't work that trick twice," warned Durgin. "The gun's hid in a hollow tree."

The withdrawing of the guards and Durgin's words gave me a new thought.

"Don't go near that tree," I warned him. "Maybe they've found it and are leaving it there to see who steals up to claim it. That would be Blue Jacket's way of fixing the guilt."

"If they knowed about it they'd know it was Durgin's work," argued Podge.

"We're safe for a few days," I assured them. "Quain will wait for his runner to return. I must carry McKee's endorsement when I go to Detroit. Come out into the sun, Podge, and eat your victuals."

He gave a high-pitched, cackling laugh, and jeered:

"I'd look pretty out there with all them Injuns walking by! First thing I'd know White Tom would be standing before me, just looking at me with them —— eyes of his."

There was no stirring him from his black mood. He was convinced his old enemy was in the Delaware village across the river and might be visiting Blue Jacket's village at any moment. So he snatched at the meat and ate it in a dark corner of the cabin much like some wild animal.

"Looks like town-meeting day with every one come in to vote," commented Durgin as he stared at Blue Jacket and a group of famous red men walking by.

"The man on the chief's right is Little Turtle," I told the New Englander; for I had seen the greatest of the Miamis—one of the greatest men any red nation ever produced—when in Detroit the preceding year.

It was commonly reported by our spies, and had been told me in Canada by British officers, that Little Turtle was opposed to

measuring strength with General Wayne. He had said that Wayne was a "chief who never sleeps," and he had advised the tribes to make peace terms and avoid a general war. His argument was that the tribes could not be expected to win three successive victories over the whites, and that better terms could be made by an undefeated red confederation than by one broken in a big battle.

It was this hesitance that permitted Blue Jacket to forge to the front as leader of the war-at-any-price faction and assume chief military leadership of the tribes. The great Miami was not actuated by cowardice, and his presence in the village was proof enough of his readiness to do his best. He was of medium height and looked even smaller beside the powerfully built Shawnee.

I pointed out Catahecassa, or Black Hoof, to the whites. He was one of the most famous Shawnee war chiefs, and he had especial interest for me, for it was said he had been present at Braddock's rout when a lad of fifteen years. The thought that I was gazing on one who might have seen my three uncles as they fought at the baggage-train to give the boy Watson—my father—a chance to escape, affected me strongly. I had seen him for the first time a year back, when he visited Detroit. His stern visage stirred me deeply, and always would stir me did I see him many times. His youth was linked up to the youth of my father at the time my father ceased to be a boy and came back home to die prematurely because of his wounds.

With Black Hoof walked Buckongahelas, most celebrated of all Delaware warriors, implacable in war and yet said to find no pleasure in torturing prisoners. Unlike the others he had a blanket hooded over his head and walked like one lost in meditation. I looked for Tecumseh; but Old Podge, venturing to peep from the door, said he had heard the guards the night before speak of this leader as being out on a scout. One of Tecumseh's brothers was in the group, a bold, stalwart figure, whose medicine had not told him he had only a year to live before the wrath of the Black Snake (Wayne) and his Long Knives would send him among the ghosts.

The triumvirate was Little Turtle, Blue Jacket and Buckongahelas. The only other trio of Northwestern Indian leaders that could have equaled these three men in bravery, military strategy and general resourcefulness was Pontiac, Cornstalk and Tecumseh; and of these three only Tecumseh lived.

Old Podge, who had overheard much of the guards' talk, informed Durgin and me:

"They're gitting ready to move down to the foot of the rapids and hold a big powwow. Red Jacket of the Six Nations will be there and will speak for peace. Blue Jacket has picked out some Wyandot, mebbe Tarhe, to speak against a peace. Red Jacket won't be listened to. Our commissioners are just wasting their time trying to make a peace. We're making believe we're at peace now. Injuns making believe the same thing, but the woods is filled with fighting. The Injuns are keen for a big fight right now, and they're fooling round and killing time only to git more of the Ottawas down here. If the Ottawas was here now they'd strike for the frontier before tomorrer morning.

"Little Turtle's got a better head 'n t'others have. Heard the guards say they should send out bands and strike at half a dozen different points so's to make Wayne separate his army in trying to defend the different settlements. The Turtle figgers this would keep Wayne from marching up here. Blue Jacket wants to come to grips with the whole army. He figgers he can lick it before a man can spit."

"General Wayne won't let anything stop his coming to the Maumee," I assured him. "The settlements must do their own fighting. He's as keen to get all the Indians before him as Blue Jacket is to meet the army."

"Then both will git their satisfy," sighed Podge. "But, Lawd! I wish I was out of this place! Anywhere rather than next-door neighbor to White Tom!"

"That's all foolishness. Not a chance in a thousand of the Delaware being near here. Even if he entered the village and saw you he couldn't touch you. You belong to Spotted Snake. Even Blue Jacket won't interfere with the Snake's prisoners."

"Matter with you, Podge, is your mind. It's sick," grunted Durgin.

"I'd ruther face the —— then face White Tom when I'm cooped up like this," replied the unhappy man.

And he withdrew to his dark corner and despite the heat of the day muffled a blanket around his head.

The chiefs continued their walk to the up-stream end of the village and proceeded to hold a council. Spotted Snake came up in a hurry and paused only long enough to say:

"If the white men listen to foolish birds they will die very slowly. They can walk about the village, but not away from it."

Then he was off to sit in the outer circle of the powwow.

We had not seen Girty that morning, for he was busy at the council place, where he would have a mat and be asked to talk. It was a fact that while he never was rewarded by the crown as were McKee and Elliott, and while he never married into a tribe as did his brothers James and George, and consequently never participated in the daily Indian life as did his brothers, there never was a white man north of the Ohio who was trusted to keep a red secret as was Simon Girty. He was admitted to councils when McKee, the lavish giver of presents and the instigator of raids and the general war, was kept out.

Noonday came, and Durgin and I went for a walk around the village, venturing in sight of the council ring but taking care not to intrude too close. We saw the council break up and the men scatter to their kettles to eat. Blue Jacket and his guests passed close to us, and I thought he would not notice us. But he halted and stared at me gravely and for the second time announced—

"There is a bad medicine in this village."

His words struck a chill to my heart, for this time he was indulging in no general observation. His words the evening before had meant nothing to me. In the red man's way he had simply said that the death of Ogden was not understood and therefore was evil. But the repetition, made to me direct, told me that he was associating us three white men with the mystery. Overnight all suspicions of a red agency apparently had been eliminated. He passed on, leaving me in a sweat and praying for Colonel McKee to arrive.

Durgin said, "You look mortally fussed."

"We're in a trap," I answered. "Blue Jacket suspects we killed Ogden."

"But by the testimony of his own men he must know neither of us had a chance to kill that cuss. In any court in the land that evidence ——"

"Don't be ridiculous," I cut in. "The only court on the Maumee is what Blue Jacket happens to think. And he believes we're responsible. I'm wondering if they've found that gun."

"I slipped it into a holler tree. Hole's five feet from the ground. No chance for a dog or the children happening on to it. We might wander round that way—I could mighty soon tell if it's there."

"They're waiting for us to do something like that. The chief planned to frighten us by his words and make us betray ourselves. It's worth your life to walk near those trees."

"Their own men testified we was with 'em in the path, facing Ogden," doggedly insisted Durgin. "How'n sin can the chief convict us when he ain't got any proof? Ogden was shot through the neck from the up-stream side of the river. We was facing him at the time. Let the ——s fret over it. That red —— can't prove nothing."

It was idle to argue with him. He was viewing the situation from the smug standpoint of his New England environment, where a man must be proved guilty. He could not seem to comprehend that Blue Jacket, leader in the conspiracy to wage a general war against all whites, did not have to prove anything. He was supreme.

So I said no more and let my friend continue in the fallacy of thinking a red man must make formal accusation and substantiate it by the same proof a Massachiusetts magistrate would require.

WE RETURNED to the cabin and renewed the fire under our kettle. Girty came up and announced he would eat with us. He brought a quarter of lean beef. Either he had changed or my fears caused me to imagine it. I believed he cast sidelong glances of suspicion at me, and certainly there was a somber, malignant expression on his dark face. To confirm my fears he began talking about Ogden's mysterious death. I felt he was playing with me, endeavoring to excite my fears until I committed myself in some fashion.

"Mighty curious," he mused with a piercing glance from his black eyes. "It's —— queer how that feller died."

"Queerest thing I ever heard tell of," agreed Durgin. "Lawd! But I couldn't believe anything more'n a fit had happened when he quit talking and slumped down.

I'd seen men took with a fit before; and he was like that, only more so."

Girty frowned as if puzzled; I hoped the Yankee's ambiguous speech was having a helpful effect.

"One of the young men couldn't resist shooting him," I suggested.

"It ain't the Injun way," he quietly reminded us. "Injuns have more respect for each other's property then white men do for their neighbors'. I've lived among both. I know."

He spoke truthfully, and I could not contradict him. He went on, as if summing up the facts:

"Ogden was in my care. The whole village knew he come with a talk from Quain, who's at Tarhe's camp. The Shawnees like Quain. He's lived with 'em a lot. Every one in this village knew Tarhe had given Ogden a road-belt that any Injun north the Ohio would respect. And Ogden's shot down with a war-arrer after he's given up his belt and was thinking himself perfectly safe in this village."

"It's mighty queer," I agreed, wishing he would abandon the subject. "Couldn't they find any trail among those trees?"

The renegade shook his head; then explained:

"Ground's baked hard. Children go there to play in the shade. Nary a sign. Whoever done it must 'a' run up-river, but we can't find out that any of the Injuns are missing. No one has seen any man sneaking up-river. None of the men gone from the village this morning. No man was seen sneaking back before daylight. Blue Jacket had thought of that and had a string of warriors stretched from the river clear to the woods all night, so's to catch any one coming in. A fox couldn't 'a' got through that line. Blue Jacket can't understand it."

"It's a mystery," I rejoined. "The man's dead. Some one killed him. Probably the Indian who did it ran around through the corn and got among the warriors during the first few minutes of excitement. You'll have to get another messenger."

"How would you like to carry my talk to Quain if the Snake will lend you to me?" he quickly asked.

"I'd rather go to Detroit and have a talk with Colonel McKee, but I'll do anything to help. I'll carry your talk."

He poked some more fuel under the boiling kettle and gruffly announced:

"The runner's on his way already. Started early this morning. I got the Scotchman to add a line to your writing, telling how Ogden was killed. Think I had him mention you fellers by name."

His eyes were boring into me as he said the last, but I was keyed up to play the rôle of innocence, and told him:

"I never met Quain that I know of. That is, I don't remember the name. I would have carried your talk if you had wanted me to. Don't see why you mentioned it if you had already started a runner."

Girty's lips parted in a grin, but there was no laughter in his eyes.

"Quain was in Wayne's camp and was arrested," he said, ignoring my words.

"They're arresting men every day. If I saw him there he must have been under a different name. I was with the army only a few days before I quit."

"Probably didn't know Ogden."

"Not by name. I knew mighty few by name. But as I got a glimpse of him by the fire his face seemed familiar."

"He seemed to know you mighty well."

And again that stabbing, sinister glance.

"He was drunk and trying to sing when I saw him in the firelight. His face looked familiar. The Indians were crowded around me so I couldn't see very good."

"Never had any trouble with him?"

"Not that I know of. There was a fight in Cincinnati when a crowd of us was drunk. He may have been in it. If he hasn't been buried I'd like to take a look at him."

"He's under ground," growled Girty. "From what he let out just before being killed I don't think he was a friend of yours."

"Soldier quarrels," I regretted. "Yet they seldom make bad blood after the fighting's over. Must have been twenty or thirty piling into each other in Cincinnati. He and I may have had a tussle, or he and I may have been fighting off the crowd. A fellow can't remember much about what happens when he has a day's leave in Cincinnati. But so far as I know, nothing but white wampum ever hung between us if we did ever have any acquaintance."

Girty suddenly gave vent to his rage and cried:

"It's a —— outrage that a man armed with a road-belt is killed in the village after coming through safe from the Sandusky!

Tarhe, of the Wyandots, won't like it. My runner gits through to Tarhe and is safe. Quain's runner, with Tarhe's belt, comes here and is killed! Blue Jacket wouldn't 'a' had it happen for anything. Tarhe will be mighty put out till Ogden's bones are covered. The minute my man gets in with Blue Jacket's road-belt the Wyandot begins to think of the difference. He'll feel ashamed. He'll feel he's been put on. A Wyandot belt can't save a runner from a Wyandot village! But a Shawnee belt saves a runner from this village! Chiefs have held their men back from the fighting for less'n that."

"It's unfortunate," I agreed. "The man who killed him must be found."

"Found and punished," firmly added Durgin as he secured a half-cooked piece of meat and began devouring it.

"Oh, he'll be punished!" said Girty with a short laugh and a flicker of a glance at the composed face of the Northerner. "And it won't be a white man's punishment. Captain Crawford died hard, but the man who killed Ogden will be kept alive till he believes Crawford didn't suffer any."

"S'pose they've got to catch their rabbit before they can cook him," ill-advisedly said Durgin.

"They'll be satisfied if they think they've caught the right one," snarled Girty. "By ——! He'll wish he'd never been born when they build a slow fire on his stomach and the squaws empty shoots of powder into his legs and arms and make him chew his own fingers."

"See here, Girty," I complained; "you're talking now about a white man being punished. And there are only three white men in the village besides yourself. I don't like it. You know we couldn't have done it if we had wanted to. You know an Indian did it. And you know Blue Jacket will not burn one of his Indians no matter how many white runners he might kill. If the fellow would step forward now and confess killing Ogden nothing would be done to him. Why don't you advise Blue Jacket to call on the guilty man to step forward and tell the truth? Then Tarhe can be smoothed down with gifts. But this talk about roasting white men is foolish talk."

I pretended to eat, although the effort was revolting. Girty remained silent for some minutes, regaining control of himself. Then he said:

"The chief won't roast one of his own men or any man of a friendly tribe. That's true. I got my mad up and talked more'n I should."

We accepted this for what it was worth, and Durgin asked about the council. Girty seemed glad to change the subject, and he proceeded to boast how he was the only white man the Indians would permit to be present.

"There'll be a general war, of course?" I asked.

"There will be just that! I'll raise —— along the Ohio until it has to come."

He ate a few mouthfuls of the meat; then he rose to leave us. Catching a glimpse of Old Podge's head being withdrawn from the door he curiously asked:

"Why don't that Simpson show himself? Don't he ever eat?"

"He isn't well. Can't bear the sun. Eyes hurt him," I explained.

"The guards say he wasn't out the cabin while they was on duty."

"I know he hasn't been farther than the door since the guards left us."

Girty nodded and walked away a few steps; then suddenly he wheeled and announced:

"I was forgetting one thing. I said there wa'n't no signs found behind the trees. That was true. I forgot to say there don't seem to be any doubt that the arrer that killed Ogden came from Blue Jacket's lodge."

Durgin gaped like a zany on hearing this, and I only hoped my own countenance was as lacking in expression. While I was trying to think of some natural reply Durgin excitedly bleated:

"Gosh all hemlock! You don't mean to say the chief or one of his boys went to work and killed that poor ——? If he done that what's to stop him from killing us on the sly ——"

"Shut your mouth!" roared Girty.

"He knows so little about Indians," I broke in as if defending my friend.

"He's either the biggest —— fool that ever come north the Ohio or ——"

He checked himself and glared at the New Englander for a few moments and found only simplicity in the man's face. Finally he explained—

"Blue Jacket says Ogden was killed with a war-arrer taken from his lodge, unless he's mightily mistook."

And his gaze switched to me, but I had myself well in hand and remarked:

"That seems as mysterious as the manner of Ogden's dying. I had no idea a man could always identify his own arrows. The killer was trying to cover his tracks. Too smart to use one of his own arrows. But to think of taking one of the chief's arrows!"

"I don't mean every Shawnee man can pick out his own arrers. When he's gitting ready for a big fight he makes a lot. He has some that other men have lost. But Blue Jacket has a red mark on the shaft of his. No Shawnee would think of stealing an arrer from the chief. Too many quivers to take one from without doing that."

With great earnestness I cried: "The Delawares! I was forgetting them. You believe one of them did it!"

No such idea had occurred to him, and for a bit he looked as stupid as Durgin ever had looked.

"The Delawares!" he slowly repeated. "Now I wonder— No! No! A Delaware would never think of killing a Shawnee prisoner, let alone a friend of the Shawnees. Besides, Ogden had a road-belt, and both villages knew it. No, no! No Delaware would ever dream of doing such a thing. The like of it ain't to be considered. Yet if White Tom took one of his crazy notions ——"

A squawking sound from the cabin interrupted him.

"Simpson's got the notion he's to be tortured by Spotted Snake," I broke in, to bring Old Podge to his senses. "That's why he keeps so close to the cabin. His mind is sick as well as his body."

Girty nodded, his thoughts refusing to be diverted to Podge.

"There's not the slightest grain of sense in what you've put in my mind by speaking of the Delawares. But it's a trail that's soon run down. I'll send a man across to see if White Tom's still in the village. He got back there yesterday afternoon, all tuckered out from a long journey from the Muskingum."

"He's probably there now," I said, fearing I had brought vengeance down on poor Podge.

"He was there yesterday afternoon. I didn't see him here in the village. But he might have come over in the evening. He mightn't be noticed with a blanket over his head. I'll speak to Blue Jacket about it. He can ask Buckongahelas to find out the truth. White Tom's been fair crazy against all whites since he lost his son. Still it wouldn't be like him to cover up a killing. He'd dance and sing and rave after doing a job like that. Whole thing seems to be twisted up—no sense to it. I can see how you might have a interest in killing Ogden. He had something he wanted to say about you. But the drunken fool wouldn't talk when he had a chance!"

"He would have talked different when he was sober," I insisted. "We may have met in a general fight. Rows every day between the men on leave. I had my share of it. But if he had a real grudge against me I don't know what it was."

"It'll keep," Girty surlily said. "Blue Jacket never leaves a mystery behind him. As it looks now none of you three men had a chance to kill him. But the chief may take a short cut and decide it was your medicine. It would have been better for you if Ogden had lived and talked. Now he can't talk, and a man can believe he had all sorts of things to tell."

"He didn't have nothing to tell that would bother us any," stoutly spoke up Durgin.

Girty walked away without a word. Old Podge's terror-stricken face showed at the door, his flabby lips trying to say something. Durgin softly swore at him with calm New England precision; but it was some time before Podge could compose himself enough to whisper weakly:

"You heard him! You heard what he said! Just a pistol shot away is the last man on earth I want to meet! If I don't git out of this mighty pert my old sculp will cover his son's bones."

"You'll kill yourself yet if you don't stop this foolishness," Durgin warned him sourly. "You ain't wearing a beard. You don't look like you did when you shot his son. He wouldn't know you in a dog's age. Put some more paint on your face and hold your head up."

"Paint!" jeered Podge. "All the paint ever spread on all the red tribes couldn't blind his eyes. But I'll never go under that ——'s knife. I'll start and run for it and die quick with a arrer or a ball through my back!"

And if we had not blocked the doorway the thoroughly frightened man would have started running through the village. We

forced him back to his corner and finally reduced him to a point where he would listen. Then I told him:

"Even if the Delaware comes he can't kill a Shawnee's prisoner. Blue Jacket is the man to be afraid of. If McKee doesn't come very soon and buy us we must try to make his storehouse and farm at the foot of the rapids."

"And be chased and fetched back," commented Durgin.

"Possibly. But if we find him he'll hear what we have to say. And if he believes we have something of value to tell the commandant at Detroit he will send us along. Once we escape this village we are prisoners of the man who recaptures us. Also he's the Indian officer, and they look to him for their guns and powder. Even Blue Jacket can't afford to quarrel with him."

This talk did not satisfy my companions; nor, in truth, did it satisfy me. Our position was very hazardous. Blue Jacket had sounded either a warning or a death sentence. The danger of White Tom visiting the village and coming to our cabin was very real. Nor did I believe, as Durgin did, that the vengeful Delaware would hesitate for a moment in recognizing Podge. In the old man's favor was the fact that he was the captive of Spotted Snake. As long as he remained mewed up in the cabin I did not believe the Delaware could harm him. But did the Delaware come before we made our escape there would be no chance of Podge's accompanying us either north or south. If he would live he must stick to his sanctuary.

OUR guards did not return. On the surface we were as free as if we had been Blue Jacket's trusted friends. When it became unendurable to remain squatting before the cabin, watching the sun's slow passage through the western half of the blue heavens, I announced that I would walk about a bit. As I had expected, Old Podge refused to leave the cabin. Durgin wanted to go with me, but there was something in the old man's face that impelled him to remain and see that our friend did nothing foolish.

No one appeared to give me any heed as I sauntered along, but never did I pass a lodge nor a group of warriors that I did not feel their sharp gaze stabbing me in the back. Only when encountering a group of young men, scarcely more than youths, did I meet with discourtesy. It was indirect but none the less nerve-trying. Without looking at me one spoke up for my benefit and said:

"They say there is a bad medicine at work in this village. They say it will be driven away."

Another quickly replied:

"Only the death of a white man can drive it away. They say it will take the death of two white men to drive it south of the Ohio."

"It will be driven very far, even to the country of the Cherokees. To drive it that far three men may have to die."

I pretended not to hear, and as boldness is ever the best course when among red men I proceeded to Blue Jacket's lodge. One of the chief's sons was standing near the entrance, and I paused and in Shawnee said—

"When does Colonel McKee come to the village?"

In good English he replied:

"I do not know. Colonel McKee is in Detroit, I think."

"I was hoping to see him here soon."

"Colonel McKee may be below the rapids. I do not know. Come inside and have something to eat."

He seemed to be a very likable chap, but I did not fool myself for a moment into thinking his English education had taken any of the red out of his nature.

I entered. One of his pretty sisters brought some beans and turnips and meat. He seated himself opposite me and ate a little, more to keep me company than because he was hungry, although as a rule an Indian will eat any time he can procure food. My gaze wandered around the lodge, and he remarked—

"You have been in here before."

"Just stepped in so my New England friend could see what the home of a great chief is like. He had never seen a warrior's lodge before."

"Weyapiersenwah has many things at Detroit," he proudly informed me.

Then with a sidelong glance of his keen eyes—

"They say the white man from the North works magic."

"He does some things I do not understand," I admitted, and wondering just how sophisticated my young host was.

"Can he kill a man by magic?"

"I do not know. I know he never has."

"How do you know he never has?"

"Because he is my friend and keeps no secret from me. Because he is not that kind of a man," I replied, feeling I was talking lamely.

"No one can tell what a magic-worker will do. Your white friend is two men. One man you know. He is like another white man. You can not know the magic-worker. His magic would leave him if you saw it."

"He does not want to kill men."

"Can he shoot a bow without taking a bow and arrow in his hands?"

I could see Durgin's alibi vanishing if this crazy belief was entertained. I declared:

"No man, red or white, can do that. I never heard of such a thing."

"Many things are done we do not understand," he muttered; and despite his white training I knew he retained all the weird beliefs of his people.

To put it another way: When the inexplicable happens the red man is not satisfied until he has attributed a cause. When the wind blows something causes it to blow; and the four wind-gods are given as the cause. A man had been killed by an arrow; therefore some one had shot the arrow. But neither red nor white man had had the opportunity; therefore some man by means of magic had shot the arrow without touching his hands to it or to the bow. The flight of the arrow must be explained, and if only the supernormal could explain it, then therein was the solution of the mystery to be found.

"Have they found the Delaware who shot the arrow and killed the white man last night?" I asked.

His eyes narrowed.

"There are no magic-workers in the Delaware huts across the river."

In desperation I insisted:

"There is one called White Tom by the white men on the Ohio. They say he works magic."

"The red men do not believe that."

Yet I had placed a new thought in his head, and I knew it would remain with him for some time. While he was mulling it over I continued:

"My friends ran away from the Long Knives with me. We do not like the Long Knives. We came here to live with the Shawnees."

"They say the Spotted Snake brought you here as prisoners," he quietly corrected.

"He met us when we were on the way here. If we hadn't seen him we should be here now."

"Weyapiersenwah and Simon-ne are angry because the white man from Tarhe's town was killed," he informed me, now shifting to the Shawnee tongue. "There is the road-belt the white man brought."

And he pointed to a string of wampum hanging beside the entrance to the left of a person entering.

"Weyapiersenwah is angry because the belt closed the road to him in this village and sent him among the ghosts. Tarhe will be angry when he hears his bag of talk was brought here by a dead man. The Shawnee are wizards. They have very strong magic. Some of our old men will build a fire of hickory bark and find the truth inside the smoke. They will say who killed the man bringing a Wyandot road-belt. Tarhe and his Wyandots will be happy and know no Shawnee worked the bad magic."

"When the old men build their fire they will see the face of White Tom, the Delaware, in the smoke. His medicine tells him to kill every white man he can see. A white man killed his son. Tarhe will believe White Tom did it, or that a Shawnee's bad medicine did it. If the old men are wise they will see the face of the Delaware."

He thought this over for a minute; then he agreed.

"That is a good bag of talk. The Delaware has listened to ghosts. We shall see what the old men find in the smoke."

I rose to depart and extended my hand, but as I did so he stooped and pretended to straighten out the mat so as to ignore my friendly gesture. As we walked slowly to the opening he halted and touched a quiver of war-arrows and remarked.

"One arrow was taken from this; the arrow that killed the white man."

"Evil birds have rested on White Tom's shoulder and whispered in his ear. They told him to take the arrow."

He had no comment for this assertion and lost no time in making the opening. As I followed him I glanced at the string of road-wampum that had protected Ogden from any wandering bands of Indians between the Sandusky and the Maumee.

The string was composed of small white beads and had the feather of a crane fastened to the top of the supporting thong or sinew. It advertised Ogden's errand to be one of peace and that he was sent by Tarhe (Crane).

Something kicked my legs as I gained the outer air. I glanced down and beheld Simon-ne, the spoiled son of James Girty's Shawnee wife. I believe the youngster was glad to see me although his greeting was about as pleasurable as the mauling of a young wild-cat. It developed, however, that he was assaulting me merely as a source of information; for he began demanding:

"Where is the white magic-man? Simon-ne wants the white magic-man."

Glad to be rid of his impetuous company I pointed in the direction of the cabin and took time to rub my shins as he raced off to enjoy Durgin's company. Blue Jacket's son, who had watched the boy, remarked—

"Even the children know he is a worker of magic."

With that he left me and walked to where Betsy, the boy's mother, was standing. At one side was the Pleiss woman, the servant of the renegade's wife. As the chief's son paused to ask some question of Betsy the white woman came to me and whispered:

"May God in His high heaven help you, mister! By His grace you still live. But git away. Git away! The woman Betsy told me while we was crossing the river that all you white men would die pretty soon."

"She heard her husband say it," I muttered.

"Not when I was round, 'less they talked in Injun. Betsy talks with Injuns and hears and says things I reckon her husband don't know about. She talked with a Injun in the canoe. He told her something. Then in English she told me. I think she wants to help you men 'cause her brat takes a liking to the Yankee. But git away! Git away tonight! And may the good Lawd help you."

"Stop talking and listen to me," I harshly told her. "Just inside this door, hanging on a peg at the left, is a string of small white beads. There is a feather fastened at the top. See if you can take them unseen. No, no—not now. Sometime after I've gone. If you get them have Betsy bring you to our cabin. Give them to me or the Yankee when no one is looking. Or toss them inside the door. Whatever way that seems best. You will be treated kindly here. You have nothing to fear."

The last for the benefit of Blue Jacket's son, who was returning to hear our talk. To him I said:

"This woman is afraid she will be hurt. Speak to her in English."

"You will not be hurt," he readily assured her. "You are safe here. Do as Betsy tells you. Bime-by, some time, you can go back to your people."

And without glancing at me he entered his father's lodge.

She bobbed her head and muttered: "I understand. Never was slow-witted."

Then she was scuttling back to her mistress, and I was continuing my stroll.

SHAWNEE BETSY'S presence led me to look for James Girty; so I was not surprized on beholding him and Simon talking together a short distance from the landing-place. On beholding me and perhaps unable to distinguish me from Durgin because of my nakedness and smears of paint, James yelled an oath and cried:

"You —— Yankee! I'll put the Injun sign on top your ears before you quit this country."

"You leave him be, Jim," warned Simon. "He belongs to Spotted Snake. It's bad medicine to fool with him just now."

"I ain't said when I'd notch his long ears. I ain't said the Snake will know who done it," replied James.

"You haven't any call to talk to me like that," I told him. "I'm what you are, a renegade. I got tired of Americans just as you did. Why do you wish to harm me?"

"Because you're a —— Yankee!"

"You're a liar. I'm a Buckskin and proud of it," I hotly retorted.

"T'other man's the Yankee, Jim," corrected Simon. "This man's a Buckskin."

As he was speaking James was sounding a yell and leaping toward me, a knife in his hand. I was gathering myself to meet the attack as best I could when Spotted Snake suddenly glided between us, his arms at his side and his brawny chest presented to the knife. James halted, the point of his weapon within a few inches of the bronzed breast. The Snake quietly said:

"Our brother forgets he is not on a war-path. He runs with a knife in his hand. He is like a foolish man. He will be falling on his knife."

James glared wrathfully at me over the savage's shoulder. Perhaps he was recalling his long monopoly of the Shawnee trade and the growing accumulation of property since he had enjoyed the privilege. Or perhaps he was afraid of the Snake's immediate vengeance. Anyway the rage faded from his face. He restored the knife to its sheath and sullenly said:

"The white man opened a bad bag of talk. Tell him to keep his mouth closed when he walks about the village."

The Snake's small eyes glittered although his voice was low and quiet enough as he answered:

"Spotted Snake knows what to tell his prisoners. The white man need not tell him what to say to them. Even Blue Jacket does not tell the Snake what to tell them. This man—" and he touched my arm— "is a very brave man. With his bare hands he was ready to fight against a knife."

James lowered at me thoughtfully and asked the Snake:

"Will you trade him? I will buy him from you at a good price. I have new guns and new coats like what the *Englishmanake* wear."

Spotted Snake's longing for a coat richly laced was betrayed by the sudden lighting up of his fierce little eyes. He folded his arms and replied:

"There is a white man with a very small heart. He hides in the cabin. The Snake will trade him."

"Two coats. I want this man."

For a few moments I feared I was to pass into James Girty's hands. Then came the welcome words—

"The Snake has spoken."

With that my captor turned and strode away, perhaps to escape further temptation.

I was anxious to accompany him, but as to do so would have evidenced weakness and would have lowered me in the Snake's estimation, I tarried and even walked closer to the two brothers. Simon wheeled on me angrily and cried:

"You poor fool! Do you want a foot of knife between your ribs? Git back to your cabin. If Jim can't buy you he can cover your dead body with gifts."

Which meant that did James murder me he could appease the Snake with liberal presents. To his brother Simon next suggested:

"Let's go down and look at that old man. Last night I almost remembered who he makes me think of."

They gave no heed to me although I followed them. I feared trouble for Podge. Durgin was outside the door, smoking a pipe and sunning himself, his bearing that of a man who has nothing to fear. Fresh whittlings were on the ground and adhering to his legs. By his side were his whittling-knife and several sticks of soft wood. His gaze widened for a moment as he beheld the infamous brothers approaching, with me trailing along a rod behind them. Several warriors, attracted by the renegades, drew in closer to the cabin.

"That's the Yankee, Jim. You got him mixed with the feller behind us," said Simon, pointing to Durgin. "The old cuss is hiding in the cabin."

Durgin picked up one of his peculiar darts, fashioned from the soft wood while I was interviewing Blue Jacket's son, and with a wide grin at the Girtys flipped it into the air and sent it skimming along over the tops of the lodges. The savages patted their mouths and stared at him respectfully. Jim Girty halted and followed the flight of the dart.

"What'n —— kind of a thingumajig is that?" he fiercely demanded.

"A new kind of a fire-arrer once you know how to make and shoot it," lazily explained Durgin.

James, ever the trader at heart, eyed Durgin speculatively. He was laying his blood-thirsty mood aside and was discovering a rich profit in the new kind of arrow. To Simon he said:

"I've changed my mind. I don't want the man that dogged us down here; and I don't want the old cuss in the cabin. I want this Yankee. I'll treat him well. Notching ears is pleasant, but other things come first."

Spotted Snake, accompanied by half a dozen braves, came hurrying up. His savage gaze questioned James Girty's purpose in visiting the prisoners. The Snake had picked up the dart and was carrying it gingerly as if afraid of its medicine.

"Did the white man send this into the air?" he asked of Durgin.

Durgin nodded and stretched out his hand. The Snake gave him the dart; the New Englander, with a swift movement of his strong arm and wrist, sent it on a long, graceful flight toward the river. When near the river it responded to a current of air and in a wide curve turned as if coming back to the village. The Snake might comprehend how it was propelled toward the river, but why it should curve around and start to come back was beyond him.

"The white man has a strong medicine!" he exclaimed.

The dart lost its momentum and in a long incline glided to the ground.

"The medicine grows weak," yelped a warrior.

I interpreted this to Durgin, and he laughed silently. Then he replied:

"It rests when I tell it to. It goes where I tell it to."

The Snake held out a war-arrow and commanded—

"Make this go."

My fear was great. Did Durgin boast he could shoot the war-arrow if so inclined, the death of Ogden would instantly be fastened upon him. I caught his eye, frowned and shook my head.

Durgin took the arrow and examined it critically, then handed it back and through me replied:

"This is a red arrer. I can't make it go. My medicine is for the arrers I make with my own hands."

"Let him see how far he can shoot it with a bow," suggested Big Bear.

Again I explained. Durgin raised his empty hands and shook his head.

"Let one of the little boys shoot it," he said. "He can shoot it farther than I can. I never shot an arrer in my life. My medicine can not help me do that."

James Girty pressed forward and eagerly offered—

"Spotted Snake, I will buy this man."

"The Snake will not trade him," was the cold reply. "Let the trader take the old man who hides his head all day."

And he stepped to the door and sternly commanded Old Podge to come out.

"I will not trade for the old man," said James.

As he spoke Old Podge emerged from the cabin and jerked his head to one side to avoid the sullen scrutiny of James. Simon gave a cry of delight and yelled:

"Look, Jim! By ——! If it ain't that old Chambers' Mill rat we knew when we was boys! Why, Jim, it's Podge! The old hound that booted us round when we was younkers! My medicine's got to working at last! To think we couldn't place him till just now!"

James Girty leaned forward and stared incredulously. He read fear in Podge's old face. He recognized him as had his brother. He began chuckling; then he laughed uproariously and evilly. When he could speak he told the Snake:

"I will trade for him. I will give twenty shoots of powder for him."

"The powder, a knife, an ax, a new gun," bargained the Snake.

"Powder, knife, ax, but no gun. He is old. He can do no work. He will live a very short time."

As he said the last he grinned sardonically.

Old Podge straightened up and stared evenly at the renegade.

"Seems my old hide is worth more'n yours is," he sneered. "Down in the settlements yours wouldn't be worth nothing 'cept to spread out as a warning to other scallywags."

Girty glided toward him, but the Snake dropped a hand to the ax in his girdle and called out:

"Let the trader wait till he has bought the man. Then the Snake and his friends will bring mats and sit down and watch how one white man uses another."

"The trade is made. I have bought him," passionately replied James. "The price is in my store on the Point."

"Then let the trader keep his hands from his belt until he has taken the man away from this cabin and out of this village. It is bad medicine to shed blood here in Blue Jacket's village. The Snake will send this man to the Point, and the canoe will bring back the powder, the knife and the ax."

With glittering eyes the savages were watching the outcome of the scene. It promised blood, and that was the drama they loved. As Spotted Snake was finishing his talk more savages came up, and I recognized them to be Delawares. My heart began sinking to a new low level. It did seem as if everything was happening all at once. One of the newcomers had a streak of white hair that threaded his black scalplock from scalp to tip. There was no

mistaking the man, although I had never seen him before.

This fellow frantically secured a passage through the group by roughly using elbows and arms. Standing before the Snake, he cried:

"The Delaware will buy this man! He killed my son on the Muskingum. I will give twice what the trader will give. I will take him away now."

"The man is sold to the trader," the Snake informed him, uneasy under the insane glare of the Delaware's eyes.

"White Tom, by the 'Tarnal!" yelled old Podge.

And a wonderful thing happened. All fear seemed to leave him, a full score of years dropped from his face, and he grinned broadly. His voice was calm and softly pitched as he said in Shawnee:

"A long trail comes to an end on the bank of the Maumee. I have walked and run through many snows and under many hot suns. My feet are tired. I did kill the Delaware's son. My medicine has told me we should meet like this some time. It is good. Sell me to him and tell him to take me away."

It was a scene to delight the red heart. Lips were tightly compressed. Small eyes gleamed to take in every detail of the promised tragedy as the onlookers began smelling blood. There was not a man present who had not long known how the Delaware father was ever seeking the white man who killed his son on the Muskingum. White Tom turned to Spotted Snake and stretched out his hands as one begging a gift.

With genuine regret Spotted Snake said:

"The man has been sold to the trader. Had the Snake known this was the killer of your son he would have sent him across the river to the Delaware village. But the man belongs to the trader. The Spotted Snake has shaken the last word from his bag of talk."

White Tom wheeled on James Girty and said:

"You are the brother of the man * who has a Delaware wife, who lives with the Delawares and is called brother by them. The Delaware wants that man. We have eaten and smoked together many times. You have always found a mat and a kettle in the Delaware's cabin. You know the Delaware can not wear his name until he has killed the white man who killed the Delaware's son. The Delaware wants that man!"

And he pointed dramatically at Old Podge.

"My village will pay what you say."

James Girty's trade was not confined to the Shawnees. Being temperate and his brother being given to drink, he picked up much trade from the Delawares. He promptly replied:

"I sell him to you, man of the Turkey Clan, so that you may wear your name again. He is yours for the price I agreed to pay—twenty shoots of powder, a knife and an ax. I will take pelts in place of the powder, knife and ax. I take no profit on my trade. I will find my profit in watching how you use him. He is yours; take him from that cabin."

If Spotted Snake intended to deliver the prisoner across the river he had no time to announce any such plan. For with an exultant yell White Tom brushed by him and began warily approaching the erect figure of Old Podge. But if my friend had encountered the inevitable he did not purpose to be carried away to the torture without a struggle. He backed to the doorway, his gaze cool and observant.

I leaped forward, striving to think of some makeshift to save my friend. Simon Girty hurled me back, and the Shawnees crowded close to me until I could not even lift my arms from my sides. Durgin remained seated near the door and did not offer to rise. Warriors were swarming in from all directions to watch the sport; and there were women and children among the spectators.

White Tom, of the Turkey Clan of the Delawares, grandfathers of the Shawnees, was proud of the rôle he was playing, and loudly called out:

"The Delaware man will soon be wearing his old name. He takes the man who killed his son. Let all see how it is done to the white man who killed the young Delaware!"

Standing in the doorway, Old Podge loudly taunted him in the Shawnee tongue:

"Your feet are slow and lame. You have been a long time catching up with the white man. He had to come to this Shawnee village, close by your village, for you to see him. Even then you could not catch him

*George Girty.

but had to buy him of a dog of a trader, who had bought him of the brave Spotted Snake. You ask the Shawnee to watch you take away the white man. So come and take him, Slow-Foot."

With a devil's scream White Tom pulled his ax and knife, and with a weapon in each hand gathered his muscles to spring upon his victim. Durgin leaned to one side and sent his whittling-knife spinning through the doorway. Old Podge vanished to pounce upon it. Almost at the same moment the Delaware leaped inside the cabin.

White men would have crowded to the door and small window, and only a few would have seen the struggle inside. The Indians held back, eagerly waiting for the fight to come into the open. Through the doorway and window glimpses could be caught of the whirling figures clutched in a death struggle. That the combat should last beyond a few seconds amazed the savages; for they knew the four-inch blade of Durgin's knife was a sorry weapon to use against the long blade and ax of the infuriated Delaware. Then again Podge was much older than his enemy.

The Delaware's yell of triumph rang out, made me sick at heart and filled me with nausea. Like a rat in a trap the old man was being done to death and in a hideous manner; and the savage audience heard the triumphant scream with ghoulish relish. But there was no sound of groaning from Old Podge. Again the Delaware shouted his victory cry, only this time what was intended to be a long-drawn-out yell was suddenly terminated and was succeeded by a gurgling, choking sound. There came the clump of a heavy body striking the hard earthen floor. Warrior glared at warrior. The two Girtys made to enter the cabin, but the Spotted Snake commanded:

"Keep back. The trade is made. Some one will come out."

As he finished Old Podge appeared in the doorway and drew himself erect like a young man. He was drenched with blood and was bleeding furiously from two awful wounds, one through the chest and one in the side. The whittling-knife, short of blade but all-sufficient for the mortal thrust, was clinched in the gnarled right hand. His emaciated frame would soon be a bloodless shell. And the marvel of it! He kept his feet long enough to lift up his knife and hoarsely shout:

"The white man dies! He sends a Delaware warrior on ahead of him to smooth his path. Take this to the Delaware village!"

And his left hand rose and hurled White Tom's black-and-white scalp-lock at the feet of the gaping Delawares. Then his legs buckled, and he lurched against the side of the door. With his last bit of strength he hurled the knife at James Girty. The renegade ducked and caught the point in his shoulder. While he was plucking it forth and cursing most terribly my old friend collapsed, slid to a sitting posture and toppled across the threshold.

One of the Delawares jumped forward with his scalping-knife drawn, but the Snake barred his advance and coldly warned him:

"The white man takes his hair with him. He was a very brave man."

I was so overcome by the tragedy that I did not sense the meaning of the hand thrust into mine; and had it not been for the spectacle of the dead man holding the attention of each pair of eyes the string of road-wampum, mechanically clutched in my hand, would have been quickly noticed. I recovered my wits enough to thrust it inside my legging, and from the corner of my eye saw the Pleiss woman working her way through the crowd. Shawnee Betsy was at her husband's side, busy dressing his hurt.

"He stung like a —— rattler to the last!" exclaimed Simon Girty.

"I'll cut the heart out of that man for giving him the knife," screamed James, now fairly beside himself with rage as he shook his fist at Durgin.

The New Englander had not moved from his original position. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and spread it over the dead man's head. James would have done Durgin mortal mischief had not Spotted Snake stepped before his prisoner and announced:

"There are only a few words left in my bag of talk. The white medicine man's knife is very strong. He shall not be struck because he gave it to his friend. It is a little knife, but it hunts down life and kills. The old white man was a very brave man. He fought well. He has done us honor to fight and die as he did. The Delawares shall not cover their heads with shame because a Delaware has been killed. He killed the

man who killed him. It is ended. Let no man touch the prisoners of the Snake."

CHAPTER VIII

FLIGHT!

COUNTING the Pleiss woman we had been four prisoners; and one had died, even as the Night Walker's vague words seemed to have forecast. Durgin reminded me of the Chickasaw's blind speech and brooded over it after White Tom's body had been removed by the Delawares and we were left alone with our dead friend.

"How'n sin did that Injun know one of us must die?" muttered Durgin. "It worries me."

"Podge would have died even if the Night Walker had heard no medicine voice. But I heard a Shawnee man say it would take the life of a white man to drive the bad medicine from this village."

"Then Podge has paid that bill."

"And I heard another Shawnee man say it would take two white lives."

Durgin jerked up his head and stared at me speculatively.

"Either you or me, eh?" he murmured.

"Not you," I consoled him. "They'll not hurt you. You can do too many tricks with a piece of string. Your darts and slings will buy your life in almost any tribe."

"Good Gawdfrey! Think I'm figgering on my own chances of getting loose? Think I'm planning to pick up my heels and leave you to hold the bag?" he indignantly retorted.

Then with a sad glance at Old Podge, whose face looked much younger in death, he added:

"We must bury him decently. Then we must try to get clear of this mess. If I can ever get back to Massachusetts and find work building ships along the blue lanes that lead down to the sea— Well-a-day! Man is like a black fly, scooting over a eaten-out pasture; like ripe wheat before the reaper——"

"The Snake has said we can bury him where we choose, anywhere outside the village. After we've done that we'll plan about leaving. McKee should come any time now."

"I won't stay in this —— hole another night," he firmly replied. "What did that Pleiss woman give you?"

His inquisitive eyes, even in the climax of the tragedy, had seen her stealthy action in passing the road-wampum to me. I explained. Durgin quickly declared:

"Why then we're ready to start now! Nothing can stop us when we show that string of beads."

"It's no good here in the village," I reminded him. "Nor among Shawnees outside the village if they know we escaped from this place."

"Then we'll start tonight unbeknownst to any of the scallywags. Before morning we'll be miles away. Land of sorrer! If we only had some one to help us get a start!"

"Old Podge will help us," I told him.

He jumped as if stung. I explained:

"We will bury him up-stream, near the clump of trees above the landing-place. You shall take the wampum and strike for Fort Jefferson. The course is plain. Just follow the Maumee——"

"Just a minute!" he barked. "Where you going to?"

"I'll circle around the village and make for the mouth of the river and hit the Great Trail that leads from Pittsburg to Sandusky Bay, to the Maumee, and then along the shore of the lake to Detroit."

"Well, —— your Buckskin insolence!"

And I could not determine whether he spoke in anger or admiration, so slow and deliberate was his observation. Then he quietly added—

"Of course I'll go with you."

It was useless to try to dissuade him. Such as he formed the backbone of Essex County, and though he was heartsick for the Ipswich River leading down to the sea I knew I could have no more loyal companion. He continued:

"It's getting dark. We'd better be about burying poor Podge."

A white man came up to our cabin. He carried no arms, and his eyes were worried.

"I'm Henry Ball," he announced. "I'm trying to work my ransom out of this awful country. I'm boating for Colonel McKee and Mat Elliott. My woman's across at the Point, earning her way home by sewing and washing. Simon Girty said I'd better lend you a hand in burying the dead man."

And his shrinking gaze dwelt on Old Podge for a few seconds.

I gave him our names and told him:

"We'll be glad of your help. We'll need

a pick and a shovel. The Indians will help us none. Where's your bateau?"

"Below the rapids. Water's low. Came up in a canoe. What's the bateau got to do with putting that dead man under ground?"

"You're a white man and an American. We want to get away from here."

"So do I and my woman," he gruffly reminded us.

"But you and your wife are safe. We'll be killed if we don't get away."

"Just what are you aiming at, mister?" This with some asperity.

"That you can help us escape by having your canoe up-stream, where we can make it unseen. When we run for it they'll think we've followed up the Maumee, striking for the six-mile portage to the head of the Wabash, then south to Jefferson. While they're looking for us in that direction we'll be slipping north in your canoe."

"Not by a jugful!" he passionately retorted, his eyes flashing. "I'm an American. You two are —— deserters. I'll help bury the dead man, but I won't stir a peg to save your hair."

Durgin bridled angrily and began muttering strong New England oaths. It was a desperate chance, and only our plight warranted me in taking it.

"We're not deserters," I told him. "We're spies."

"Spies! And wanting to go north!" he jeered.

"In God's good mercy, clap a stopper on your tongue," Durgin fiercely warned him. "Let Simon or Jim Girty hear you, and we'll dance round a post till we're well cooked."

"It's because we're spies that we want to make Detroit," I insisted.

"And our blood'll be on your head if you don't help us," added Durgin.

He did not believe us. He believed we were deserters and were about to receive treatment we had never counted on. And he believed we were meeting with our just deserts.

"I'll do what I've said—for the dead man. You two must shift for yourselves," he decided.

But I was not through. I urged him:

"Go to the Point and speak with the Pleiss woman alone. Ask her about us. She's honest."

Just having returned from the lake, he had heard nothing about Mrs. Pleiss. I narrated the facts of our capture, and he began to waver. Finally he groaned:

"It's a mighty big 'sponsibility! I'd rather cut my hand off then to help two deserters. But if you're Wayne's spies I'd lose a hand to help you get clear. I'll see the woman and have a talk with her."

"Then act promptly, for we must take our friend up-stream above the crossing before it gets dark. We must be finishing our work when it is dark. Then for a run up the river-bank and a jump into your canoe."

"I'll talk it over with the woman. I'll be back to lend a hand in digging the grave anyway. What happens after that all depends."

He would promise nothing beyond that, except that he would hold his tongue concerning our confession to being spies. When he had hurried away we fashioned a litter from two poles and two blankets. Durgin went inside the cabin and returned with a small bundle of bolts which he placed between the blankets. We took our time in the preliminary preparations, for we did not plan to start with our sad burden until dusk was setting in.

The Indians kept well away from the cabin, even the young boys conquering their curiosity. Undoubtedly the word had spread that it was bad medicine to go near the dead man. His medicine, or magic, had been powerful enough to permit him to kill a younger and stronger man well-armed. The mortal weapon was almost insignificant in the red men's estimation. If Old Podge's medicine would aid him so singularly in life who could say it would not strike a blow to promote his vengeance even after he was dead? It was because of this fear that Spotted Snake had given us the freedom of the village outskirts to bury our friend. Nor did either of the Girtys return to watch us.

The Delawares, who had come with White Tom across the river and who had carried his remains back to his village, now surprized me by approaching the cabin. I had hoped the tabu would keep them away even as it kept Blue Jacket's men away. However, they did not venture close and came to a halt a few rods distant. I noticed they wore their blankets over their heads. My fear that they might do us harm vanished. One of them said:

"There is the white man who killed our brother. Will the man who walks softly

look on his face to see if he knew him before he went among the ghosts?"

A tall figure, heavily blanketed, detached itself from the group and slowly approached. I was thrilled to hear a familiar voice replying:

"The medicine of the Night Walker of the Panther Clan of the Chickasaws is very strong. The dead man can not hurt him. The Night Walker went to fight by the side of the Black Snake. His medicine voice told him it was not good. He comes to fight against the Black Snake. He has looked on many dead white men."

Then he strode up to the body, pulled back the blanket and gazed for a moment on the placid face of one who had finished with fear. Replacing the blanket, he straightened and told the waiting group:

"The Night Walker does not know this white man. Why is he left above ground like a dog? His medicine will not like it."

Hate-Evil Durgin opened his mouth as if to speak, his bulging eyes alive with surprize. I kicked his shin and in Shawnee assured the Night Walker—

"His bones will be covered this night near the place where they cross from the Point."

The Night Walker, now in the rôle of one who was an enemy to the Americans, did not deign to glance at me. I loudly proclaimed:

"Two white men are here to fight against the Americans. My ears are glad to hear the Chickasaws have taken up the ax against the Thirteen Fires."

The Night Walker hooded his head in his blanket. As he returned to the waiting Delawares he coldly announced—

"The Chickasaws lift the ax against all dogs."

And as he strode away he drew the Delawares after him.

"Land of love! What does it mean? Has that critter deserted too?" babbled Durgin.

"Just as you and I have deserted. He has followed us to help us. Didn't he say he might come to us when one of us died? But if you open that clumsy mouth of yours again and let on that we know him we'll both be roasted."

"I sha'n't speak 'less I'm spoken to," grumbled Durgin. "No use to loud up to me."

NOW the crepuscular tints were fading from the sky, and clouds were packing in. We had every promise of an overcast night. We picked up the litter and slowly proceeded up the river. We quickly noted that the Shawnees were avoiding us. Women called their children indoors as we approached. When we reached the council place we paused as if to rest, in reality to look for Ball. We were outside the town and were alone. Durgin breathed deep and rapidly, and whispered—

"Nothing to stop us when we take to our heels!"

"Nothing except a hatful of bullets and a bundle of arrows," I warned him. "In the cornfield on our right, and ahead up the river where the timber stretches away from the bank, are men to turn us back."

"I see nothing. It's too dark," he muttered. "How do you know they're there?"

"Because they are Indians. I heard something rustling in the corn. It was not the wind. They will not come near us while we are digging and filling the grave. But they are ahead of us and on our right. The town is behind us, and the river is on our left. Every move will be watched. We're still inside the trap."

We picked up the litter and advanced. A small fire was burning where Ogden was killed, but I saw no one beside it. As we were passing the clump of trees from which Durgin had loosed the deadly bolt, Henry Ball startled us by suddenly stepping into view. He had a pick and a shovel. As he joined us he said warningly:

"Not so fast. Give me time to talk a bit. I've had words with the Pleiss woman. She speaks well of you; but she can't prove you ain't deserters. All she can say was you give her and her fambly a neighborly lift across the Ohio. Of course she believes you're all right. I didn't let on I had suspicions. But I ain't sure of you. Now this is what I'll do: I'll give you a chance to steal my canoe and git away if you can. If you're caught you must swear to the Girtys you stole it."

"Agreed. Where is it?"

"It's under the bank up-stream, where you see the two fallen trees. Go down the bank there, and you'll find it. There's Injuns in the wood beyond the fallen timbers, and the corn is full of them. They won't come near this spot till the grave's filled in.

But they've got you surrounded unless you float down the river."

"Good! We ask no more. We'll keep faith. Now let's to work. It's growing dark very fast."

"Just one thing more," he insisted. "You must give me time to return to the village before you cut and run. They'd have my hide off in a jiffy if they thought I'd helped you."

"You shall leave before we've finished. You shall have time to reach and speak with them before we run," I promised.

The darkness was hastened by the obscuring clouds; by the time we had passed a short distance beyond the clump of trees our range of vision was much lessened. The woods up-river were a blurred mass, and the broad cornfields a vague, smooth carpet. Any savages spying on us from woods or corn must leave their coverts and venture into the open if they would observe us closely. We discovered no signs of them closing in; Ball said they would be content to locate us by the sound of the pick and shovel. We worked rapidly, Durgin being worth the two of us, and soon we had our friend wrapped in his blankets and interred. Two peeled wands were set in place to mark the grave.

"Keep picking and shoveling like we hadn't finished," mumbled Durgin.

"I'm to have time to reach the village before you run for it," Ball anxiously reminded us.

"Start now," said Durgin. "I'll go as far as the trees with you."

I knew the nature of his errand and proceeded to make much noise with the shovel. Occasionally I spoke aloud after the two left me. It was difficult to distinguish their forms, for they kept between me and the trees. A few stars were in the west, but these would soon be blotted out by the onsweeping clouds. As I paused to rest a bit and listen for a spying step a savage stood at my side and gave me a rare start.

"Which way do the white men run?" he whispered.

"The Night Walker! Down the river—to Detroit. There's a canoe under the bank where two trees rest on the ground."

"Shawnee men are behind the fallen trees. They crept down from the woods up-stream. I have filled my mouth with water and have blown it into the air to bring rain. I have swallowed the smoke of my tobacco and have pointed my pipe to the clouds, and have waved my arms to make them chase after the hidden sun and make the darkness very thick like a black cloth. My white brother will be caught and tied if he goes for the canoe. The Night Walker will bring it down here, and the Shawnee men will not hear him. When you hear a fish splash you will go down the bank and find it."

"You go with us?"

"You will see me before you reach the mouth of the river. Shawnees and Delawares will not see me with you. When you see me in Detroit do not open a bag of talk. I shall be a warrior ready to fight against the Thirteen Fires."

He glided toward the river-bank, confident that his conjuring had brought the clouds to hide our flight. I knew he was on the ground, working his way like a snake to the edge of the bank, but even at short range I could not see him. I pounded the spade and talked aloud. Finally Durgin came back and began feeding New England hymns to all listening ears.

"Ready to run for it?" he whispered.

I explained the change in our plans and directed him to gain the bank and wait for me. And as he made off and as I could feel the red spies crawling in closer I clattered the pick and shovel and talked as if addressing my companion.

It seemed an interminable time that I waited to hear the soft splash of a fish. I feared the Night Walker had overestimated his cunning and had found the task of moving the canoe too delicate. I knew he would not permit himself to be discovered near the canoe; nor did I believe he would risk coming back to us to confess failure. His way would be to resume his rôle of hostility to all Americans and later explain that his cunning was not at fault, but that the medicine voice had warned him not to touch the canoe. That he would desert us while we were in danger never once entered my mind.

But at last it came, audible only to listening ears close to the bank. Bowing low, I softly ran to the bank, slipped down its steep slope and all but landed on Durgin's broad back. He was kneeling and holding the canoe ready to push off.

There was no sign of our flight being discovered as I steadied the craft and whispered to the New Englander to get aboard

without noise and lie down in the stern. The wind was blowing strong, and the Night Walker's calumet was rushing the clouds rapidly under the western stars. As I took my place and gently pushed off into the current a drop of rain fell on my face. Whether it was red medicine, white prayers or just luck, I was duly grateful.

Durgin in the bottom of the canoe gave a convulsive jerk as there sounded the wild yell of some Shawnee watcher who had approached close enough to the grave to find the spot deserted. From up the river and from the direction of the swaying corn the cry was repeated. The chase was on. I mumbled prayers for a downpour.

The dancing flames of the fire below us at the landing-place were reflected weirdly in the black water. Farther down and on the opposite shore burned three fires at the Delaware village. These were two danger points we must pass. The savages kept calling out to each other as we hugged the bank and worked down-stream. Then a white man began shouting in Shawnee:

"Up the bank! They have gone up the river!"

I recognized him as Simon Girty.

A deep, bass voice thundered above the wind:

"Another white man must die to drive the bad medicine away from my village. The Spotted Snake is ready to burn one of the men."

This would be none less than Blue Jacket.

But all this urging would not have drawn all the Shawnee from the neighborhood of the fire had not a Shawnee warrior some distance up-stream fiercely yelled:

"Here they are! Big Bear has found them! Spread out! Spread out! They run toward the corn!"

This announcement sent every able-bodied man rushing either toward Big Bear or at right angles from the river to stop our entering the corn. Those who ran along the bank passed within a rod of us. Big Bear repeated his triumphant cries, and the village was fast emptying itself in the logical direction we would have taken if it had not been for Henry Ball, sent to us by Girty.

I dipped my paddle more rapidly and swung out toward the opposite bank, where excited voices on the Point were demanding to know what was the matter. Men would soon be making the crossing. With a final sweep of the paddle I shot the light craft down-stream, bowed low and waited to see what would happen. We shot through the fitfully illuminated zone; there came no fresh alarms. I rose to my knees and sent the craft inshore to avoid the streamers of light being blown from the Delaware fires across the stream.

The Night Walker had played the fugitive and was leading the enemy a merry chase. His occasional betrayal of his position completely deceived the Shawnees and Girty into believing the white men were all but within their grasp. The clamor of the chase was receding as we drew opposite the Delaware village.

A new danger threatened us as some of the Delawares began crossing to learn the cause of the disturbance. I heard a man say the prisoners must have escaped, and another declare one of us was to have been roasted in the morning to drive the bad medicine away from the village. Durgin shifted his position, and something scraped across the side of the canoe. I whispered for him to remain motionless if he valued his life.

"Getting the bow-gun ready," he replied.

I commanded him to desist and gently sent the canoe against the bank and held it there. At this point luck made a double turn in our favor. The Delawares changed their course to a long diagonal and made for the light at the landing-place; the rain began falling smartly. Three canoes passed our position before I allowed our craft to float down the darkness.

Even when clear of the two villages we could not make haste, for the water was low. I could not let Durgin help me for fear he might upset us. But there was no noise of pursuit, and if the savages had turned their attention down-stream they were hunting in deadly silence. Nor did the cries of discovery continue up the river. This led us to believe that the Night Walker had been too hard-pressed to keep up the deceit and that the Shawnees were suddenly learning Big Bear's hopes of an easy capture were misleading.

A few miles below the villages we grounded on a rock and were compelled to carry the canoe nearly half a mile through shallow water and over half-submerged rocks. It rained steadily; the whole business was a dismal one. If there was a channel through the obstruction—and there must have been as Ball came up by canoe—we could not

spare the time to find our way through it. Durgin cursed whole-heartedly as he bumped into rocks or suddenly dropped to his waist in water. His chief concern was for the bow-gun and to keep the bow-string dry.

Despite all efforts to proceed noiselessly we would have betrayed our position several times if not for the rain and gusty wind. When it was permitted us to embark we paddled north for the rest of the night, Durgin aiding me when there seemed little danger from rocks. Because of the gloomy, storm-torn sky we prolonged our efforts nearly to the hour of sunrise.

I estimated the distance covered to be twenty miles when we finally turned in to the east shore and hid under some thick willows. We had made half the distance to McKee's place. Durgin was eager to abandon the canoe and foot it.

"We've got my bow-gun and ten bolts," he persisted when I refused to entertain the suggestion. "Nary a Injun has shown his hide. We're hungry and need food. We can reach the trading-house before the Injuns suspect we're down this way."

"It makes no difference whether we're caught here or within a stone's throw of McKee's," I told him. "We've seen no Indians, yet they're swarming up and down the river on both banks. We've left no down-stream trail, but neither is there an up-stream trail. The Night Walker left signs for a short distance only. The storm helped us, but it didn't keep the scouts in the village. Big Bear is out to redeem himself. Spotted Snake is frantic to recapture us. Blue Jacket will not rest until he has us. The two Girtys are making every effort to run us down. We must keep snug and try to push through tonight."

Durgin gloomily contemplated the thick, silent woods crowding down to the brink of the opposite bank. As the minutes passed and there was no sign of the enemy he became disgruntled and fumed—

"There ain't a Injun within a mile of here."

As he was speaking some small birds flew from the ground-growth across the shrunken stream. I called his attention to their short flight; then the bushes parted and two warriors stood on the bank. One had a blanket around his middle; the other was naked except for his leggings and breech-clout. Durgin sucked in his breath as he glared at the two copper-colored figures. My own heart gave a jump as I recognized the man with the blanket to be the Night Walker.

For a minute the two men stood there gazing up and down the river. Then the Chickasaw made a gesture, and I surmised he was suggesting that they descend the bank to get a longer view of the stream. The other, pock-marked of face, dropped to the water's edge and waded out to his knees. The Night Walker threw aside his blanket and followed him.

If not for the blanket left on the shore I would have believed they purposed crossing. Yet they advanced, wading slowly, occasionally pausing to gaze up and down the river. They continued in this fashion until they were immersed to their arm-pits. The Shawnee, holding his gun and powder-horn above his head, now had enough of such reconnoitering and turned to go back.

He lost his foot and vanished as suddenly as if some submarine monster had seized and dragged him down. The Chickasaw man plunged his arms under water as if to help him regain his feet. But curiously enough the arms were not withdrawn, nor did the submerged man reappear. Instead the water boiled furiously, and a pair of kicking feet grotesquely danced above the surface. The Chickasaw, bending over until his face at times was in the water, seemed to be having a desperate time of it. Durgin was breathing in gasps as he watched their strange behavior. He fairly snorted aloud in amazement as the Night Walker straightened and glared suspiciously at the hidden banks. Then our red friend began making his way inshore, towing something behind him as he went.

"By the boats of Essex County! If he ain't drowned that ——!" choked Durgin. "Went to work and drowned him like a rat after knocking his feet from under him!"

We watched the Chickasaw get his victim up under the bank and pile some driftwood on him. When he had finished and was draping his blanket about him I gently agitated the low-hanging willow boughs screening our hiding-place. Almost instantly the keen eyes caught the sign. I thrust out my paddle. Without any hesitation the Chickasaw plunged into the river and began crossing.

"Drowned him like a —— rat!" whispered Durgin.

Our friend swerved down-stream and

landed some distance below us. Durgin was eager to go and meet him, thinking he had failed to locate us. But I held him under the willows. After several minutes the Chickasaw slipped down the bank behind us as softly as a snake, squatted at the water's edge and rested his powerful hands on the side of the canoe.

"You saw the Shawnee man die?"

"We saw a brave Chickasaw kill the Shawnee man," I replied.

"He was a brave man. But his medicine voice could not make him hear. The Cherokees called the Shawnees wizards. They have traveled around so much their medicine must be tired, like an old man."

Having made a bid for our praise and having received it, he proffered us a small bag of parched corn, which we gobbled hungrily. Then he advised:

"Let both white men sleep. If the Shawnee men come near, the Night Walker will cry out. When it is dark the white men can follow the river-path."

"Are many of them down this way?" I asked.

"The dead man and the Panther man were the first. He was of the Bear Clan. The panther is quicker than the bear. Big Bear was a brave man."

I had failed to recognize the Shawnee as Big Bear. His false alarm had made it possible for us to escape. I almost felt sorry he had to die. The Night Walker continued:

"Many Shawnees are coming this way now. They found a trail above the village that ended in the air, like a bird hopping along the first snow, then taking to wing."

And his small eyes twinkled as he found something humorous in the trick he had played on Blue Jacket's village.

"Sleep. The Night Walker will be near. If the white men are caught the Night Walker will not be caught with them. If he sees they must be caught he will be the first to point them out."

Durgin did not relish this speech, interpreted by me, but I appreciated the good sense of having the Chickasaw remain above all suspicion. I quieted the New Englander. The Night Walker hissed softly. Up-stream and on the opposite bank a Shawnee trailer was standing in full view. Durgin held his breath until purple of face. The Chickasaw simply explained:

"He follows the signs of Big Bear and the Panther man. He will find where they entered the water. He will think we crossed to this side."

"He will find the body of Big Bear," I warned him.

"The body is covered. It is under the bank above where we entered the water. There are no splashes of water on the rocks. Stay here. The Shawnee will find no path leading to this place."

I WATCHED the Indian as he scrutinized our side of the river. When he vanished into the green wall behind him I spoke to the Night Walker. Receiving no answer, I turned and found he had left us.

"He was standing right back of me," whispered Durgin. "But how'n Tophet could he drop out of sight like that and we not know it?"

"He is of the Panther clan. He is as soft-footed as your Northern lynx. Go to sleep. I will stand guard for a while. Then I will sleep."

The New Englander at first would not heed my advice and insisted he could not close his eyes with an enemy so near. But after waiting for nearly half an hour he decided the Shawnee had passed on down the river or had turned back to the village. He gave me the bow-gun and a bolt and spread a blanket on the ground. Soon he was breathing heavily.

But the Shawnee trailer had not left the neighborhood. Once more I beheld him. He had followed Big Bear's and the Chickasaw's trail in gaining the edge of the bank. With barely a pause he slipped down to the water's edge and studied the ground. The signs were plain where the Shawnee and the Chickasaw had entered the stream. Instead of entering the water, however, he moved down-stream, searching the ground for more signs. I breathed in relief as he disappeared around a willow-covered bend.

But the man was suspicious that all was not as it should be; for soon he returned, walking with his head thrust far forward. He came to a halt opposite our position. Now I expected him to make the crossing, and if he held a straight course he would be quite sure to stumble upon our hiding-place. I picked up the bow-gun, caught the cord on the little wheel and placed a bolt in the trough. But instead of crossing, the fellow did what the Night Walker had said

he would not do; he commenced searching the shore up-stream.

I never could understand why he persisted in seeking signs when the trail plainly told of two men crossing the river. I knew when he found it by the way he jerked up his head and swept his gaze about him. For sixty seconds he remained crouching, his gun clutched in his two hands, glaring at our side of the river.

Satisfied none was in ambush near him, he dropped the gun to lean forward and pull the concealing mass of drift aside. Swinging his head around to guard against a surprize, he proceeded to examine the body of Big Bear to learn how he had died. That he was puzzled at finding no marks of violence, and that he could not comprehend how a Shawnee man could drown in shallow water or be drowned by an enemy as the driftwood testified, was suggested by his thoughtful pose as he stood and scanned the stream and then shifted his gaze to the Chickasaw's victim. It pleased me immensely that he did not sound a loud cry; for his failure to announce his discovery proved he did not believe that any of his tribe were near.

At last he came to a decision. Replacing the drift over the body, he glided down-stream to where the Night Walker had made the crossing and plunged in. I placed a hand over Durgin's lips and sharply jerked his foot to awaken him. The sleep left his eyes while the Shawnee was in mid-stream, and he nodded to show he realized we were in danger. Sitting erect, he gently pushed me aside and took the bow-gun. I warned him not to shoot until the man was very close.

Holding his gun and powder-horn above his head, the Shawnee came on and needed to swim but a few strokes in making the passage. I could see his nostrils dilate and pinch in as he warily worked toward the willows. He gave all the appearance of possessing a sixth sense which was warning him of a hidden danger. Possibly the concentrated stare of our eyes told him he was being watched, for the human gaze can cause even a town-dweller to feel uneasy and glance about.

When he was within fifteen feet of us I still pressed a restraining hand on Durgin's shoulder as he crouched there with the bow-gun in position, with his finger eager to turn the wheel and loose the deadly cord. The questioning eyes of the Shawnee darted up and down and by our hiding-place several times, but each time his field of vision was shortened until at last the head came to a rest and the baleful gaze was fairly centered upon the spot where we were hiding. The canoe was effectually concealed, and we were more securely hidden than was the canoe; and yet he knew an enemy was there before him. He suddenly twisted his head as if attracted by something down-stream, and with his gun ready to shoot took a step as if on the point of leaving us.

"Fire!" I ordered.

As I said the word the savage whirled about, brought down his gun and pulled the trigger. The piece missed. The *twang* of the taut cord seemed unusually prolonged. The Shawnee dropped his gun and held his hands grotesque and limp before him. We were astounded to behold the feathered shaft of a long war-arrow protruding from his left side. Down he splashed into the shallows, and red threads radiated over the ripples.

It was not until he struck the water that I saw the scarlet splotch on his neck and realized that Durgin's bolt had passed entirely through. The bushes swung apart behind us, and we wheeled to behold the blazing eyes of the Chickasaw. With a grunt he darted into the water and dragged the dead man in under the willows.

"What medicine did that? What medicine spoiled my hunting?" he demanded, pointing at the perforated throat.

I pointed to the bow-gun. The Chickasaw eyed it with reverent respect. I clapped Durgin's shoulder and said it was his medicine. The Chickasaw said:

"They say he has a very strong medicine to help him. They say he uses a wizard's gun."

"The arrow is very short. It passed through the neck. There is magic in it," I informed him.

"The magic should bring it ashore. It will tell things to the man who picks it up," said the Chickasaw, and he pointed to the bolt drifting down the ripples.

I was for recovering the telltale bolt, but the Chickasaw would not permit it. He pointed toward the silent shore and said:

"All that walk and crawl and fly have two eyes. How many eyes have the trees, white man? You do not know. The Shawnees and Delawares are very near."

Durgin insisted on having our friend's speech translated into English, and after I had finished he showed uneasiness and insisted that we push down-stream at once. Opposed in this—an open invitation to be murdered—he declared that we at least must shift to another hiding-place, the presence of the dead warrior disquieting him. The Chickasaw repeated that we must wait where we were until nightfall, but we compromised with the New Englander by removing the body. The Night Walker and I conveyed it up-stream and covered it with river-drift. In doing this we left signs the first red passer-by would be quite sure to notice and investigate.

However, I was glad to escape the stare of the dead eyes, and I believed our side of the river would not be searched so thoroughly as the other. The Night Walker returned to the canoe with me and offered to stand guard so that Durgin and I might sleep. When I opened my eyes it was sundown, and Durgin was munching parched corn. The Chickasaw announced—

"While the white men slept the Night Walker's medicine voice told him to walk with the white men."

We were highly pleased to have his company, and with the first darkness we were afloat. The water was shallow, the channel eccentric, and we did little paddling. We felt our way by poling; and an hour of slow progress convinced us the night would pass and find us short of our destination. So we carried the canoe ashore and concealed it under overhanging boughs.

It was a great relief to feel the firm path under our feet. We came to a small Miami village, abandoned, which the Night Walker would not enter for fear of ghosts.

When in the early morning we sighted the Ottawa village of Roche de Bœuf (Buffalo Rock) across the river it was our turn to exercise prudence and for the Chickasaw to court peril. It was with the utmost difficulty that we dissuaded him from crossing and making a sly attack on the sleepers. He would not enter a village of six empty huts, but he gladly would have sought advancement as a warrior by stealing into a big occupied village and hurling defiance at the savage Ottawas.

The mists were clearing and it was quite light when the path quit the woods and permitted us to see the tilled fields, the trading-house and warehouse of Colonel McKee. The Chickasaw stared at the buildings and tilted his head as if listening.

"The Night Walker now walks alone," he announced. "If you see him between here and Detroit you will not know him. His eyes will be like a dead man's when they look at you. But if Death runs along your trail the Night Walker will stop him. Hide the medicine-gun. It is not good for Shawnee, Miami or Delaware to see. McKee will put peace wampum around your necks so that no one will hurt you; but you must get to Detroit before Blue Jacket's men come and say you are to go back with them."

Durgin was loath to part with his bow-gun but was sensible enough to realize our safety depended on cunning and not armed resistance. Without a word the Chickasaw took the gun and turned back into the woods, leaving us to cross the fields and seek the protection of the British Indian Agent, Colonel Alexander McKee, formerly deputy Indian agent under Sir William Johnson.

He was a native of Pennsylvania, and he broke his parole when he fled to take service under the crown and fight against his countrymen. He was the man whom General Wayne blamed above all others for the red war now about to block all white roads leading north from the Ohio. Any appeal to this man's protection would be successful only after we had convinced him that the commandant at Detroit could profit by the information we possessed.

A wisp of blue smoke rose from the trading-house. Several curs ran out growling and yapping as we boldly left cover and made for the building. We kicked a path through them and reached the low door. We could hear some one moving about inside, and Durgin whispered that he caught a glimpse of some one moving by the small window.

"Ho, the house!" I heartily called out. "Colonel McKee, two recruits for his Majesty's service need food and clothing."

The door swung open, and we entered the darkened room. The door closed; we heard the bar fall in place. For a moment the gloom of the long, low room baffled the gaze. Then we found ourselves suspiciously scrutinized by half a dozen savages. Colonel McKee was not there.

TO BE CONCLUDED

THE MATE OF LE MAIRE

by Bill Adams

His shipmate—August, '99

THEY found him on a door-step
  At an orphanage in Hull;
They took him in and nourished him
  And kept his belly full;
He learned the art of writing,
  And they taught him how to spell,
And figures for arithmetic,
  And other things as well,
    And they named him Johnnie Martin.

They sought to give him learning
  For to make his living on;
He sat, the pages turning,
  And he smiled, did happy John;
And when they grew discouraged
  Because he wouldn't learn
They often passed the birches out
  And Johnnie took his turn;
    Did Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

They missed him of a morning,
  And young John returned no more;
For Hull it is a seaport
  By the chilly North Sea shore
And Johnnie felt the twitching
  That his fathers had before;
    Did Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

For many years young Martin,
  Oh, he sailed along the sea,
And sailed forever jesting
  And with laughter rising free;
His hands were raw and broken
  And his clothing it was wet,
But young Johnnie kept a-smiling
  With his firm lip set;
    Did Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

One day there sailed a packet
  From the port o' Liverpool,
With cheering and with racket,
With her big wide belly full
Of outward general cargo
  For the seaports far away,
And the lad who was her chief mate
  Was a lad indeed that day,
    'T'was Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

"*The Mate of Le Maire*," *copyright*, 1923, *by Bill Adams*.

Stout Johnnie was a bucko,
  Oh, stout Johnnie was a whale,
Stout Johnnie was a devil
  When it came to "Carry sail";
And the skipper of his packet
  Was a randy dandy lad
Who grinned at all the racket
  And the fine chief mate he had,
    His chief mate, Johnnie Martin.

They drove her down by Tuskar,
  And they kept her driving on,
She reeled beneath her skysails,
  And she knew the hand of John;
Of Johnnie of the orphanage,
  The lad of nameless birth,—
A lonely little bastard
  And the salt of all the earth
    Was Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

They ripped her down through Biscay,
  And they ripped her farther yet,
And they ripped her through the trade winds
  With her thirty big sail set;
She tossed the sea all over her
  Till she was shining wet,
    And her Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

She made a record passage
  Till she came to grim Le Maire,
Where the ice froze to her rigging
  And the sea-fowl paused to stare;
Her three topgallants ribboned,
  Her topmasts tore away—
Ah, 'twas hell indeed for packets
  About Le Maire that day—
    And he laughed, did Johnnie Martin.

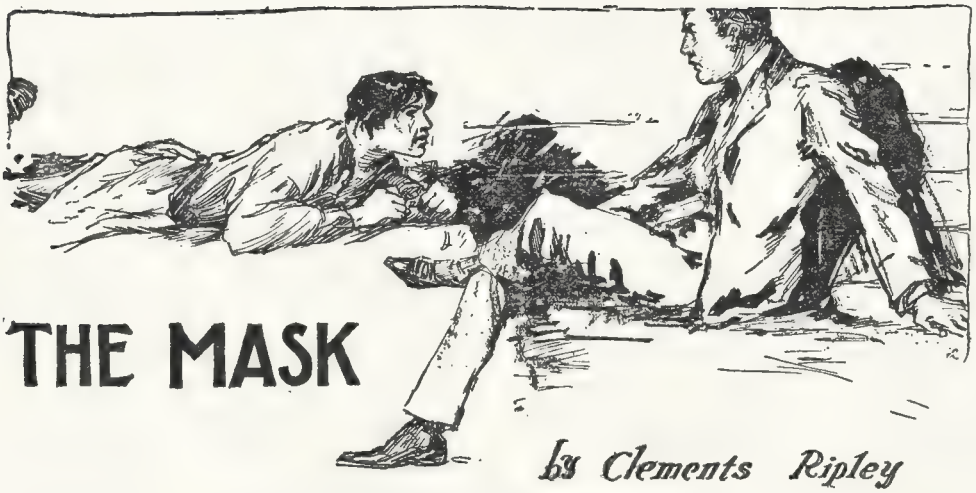
Her skipper, he was crab meat,
  And the half her hands were dead;
Le Maire's dark skies were lowered to
  Her broken masts o'erhead:
Her cook was staring crazy,
  And her sailmaker mad:
But she bore a bucko laddie,
  Ah, a bucko, bucko lad,
    Named Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

He rigged her up, all jury,
  And about the Cape she came,
Like a dainty limping lady
  Who had walked the ways of shame:
But Johnnie Martin loved her,
  Oh, he loved her just the same,
    Did Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

They found her in the tropics,
  With the rust upon her sides,
A-pitching and a-lifting,
  And a-swinging to the tides;
With three mad men aboard her
  And the rest gone overside,—
And a lad whose hair was whitened,—
  Oh, he held her like a bride,
    Did Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.

He stood, the last man standing,
  And he clung unto her wheel,
His tired eyes smiling kindly
  At the lifting of her keel:
He stood, alive, but dying,
  His packet's colors flying,
And the poor old ship a-sighing,
  To his hands upon her wheel,
    The hands of Johnnie Martin.

They buried Johnnie Martin
  In the sleepy tropic deep,
And they left the smiling orphan
  To a sailor's quiet sleep:
They lowered her colors flying,
  To wrap around him, dying,
Oh, they wrapped him in her colors
  For his last long sleep,
    Happy Johnnie, Johnnie Martin.



THE MASK

by Clements Ripley

Author of "Enough Rope," "Ain't That Our Luck," etc.

"HEY, mister. Don't look round." James Barret's hand, in the act of brushing a bit of lint from an immaculate sleeve, stopped in mid-air. The whispered words were so low as to be barely audible, but there was a tense desperation in the tone that held him rigid.

"Under the pile of sacks behind you," came the whisper again. "I'm an American in trouble. If you're game, put your hand in your pocket."

Barret didn't feel game. Eight months in Soviet Russia had taught him a number of things, most of them unpleasant. Above all it had taught him the unwisdom of meddling in things he didn't understand. And yet there was something in the tone that made him impulsively slide his hand into his pocket.

"Atta boy," came the whisper, charged with relief, and Barret, who was having disquieting afterthoughts warmed to it.

"Look for a tall man with black whiskers and a fur cap. When he's gone take your hand out of your pocket."

Glancing along the platform his gaze took in the half-dozen flat-capped soldiers of the Red Army who lounged in front of the box-car railroad station, the shawled peasant women with their innumerable bundles, waiting in stolid patience, as they had waited for the last two days, for the train to Moscow, and finally picked out the tall, whiskered man with the fur-cap. Him he watched with increasing disquietude as he strolled along the platform, glancing from left to right and finally disappeared behind the station.

For perhaps five minutes he watched for the man's reappearance. Then he drew his hand out of his pocket.

In a flash a figure slipped like a weasel from under the sacks and stood beside him.

"Talk to me," he said swiftly. "Don't look surprized. Think any one saw me?"

Barret shook his head. They were at the far end of the platform. It was unlikely that any one had noticed the maneuver.

"Listen," began the other tensely, "I'm in a —— of a mess——"

Barret felt a sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach. The painful realization came to him that he had let himself in for something. A moment ago it would have been perfectly simple to have moved fifty feet up the platform and washed his hands of the whole affair, and that, he reflected, was what anybody but a fool would have done. He knew nothing about this man beyond the fact that he was dirty, generally seedy in appearance, and had a hard, sharp face with a sardonic impudence about it that was far from reassuring.

The man seemed to sense his thoughts.

"Oh, if that's the way it is," he remarked casually, "there's still time to get out of it. I haven't got anything on you, you know."

Barret's broad, good-natured face flushed. There was a cynical glint in the man's narrow eyes that roused a certain

stubborn irritation in him. It was as if he had taunted him with cowardice, and although every reasoning faculty in him cried out against it his overpowering impulse was to prove the man a liar.

"What's your name?" he asked, more to cover his irritation than anything else.

"Morgan's the one I'm using."

Reason assumed control. It was sheer insanity to play with this sort of thing. In his community a man didn't just use any name that came to hand. One surname sufficed a man all his life. This business wouldn't do. He decided to withdraw, firmly but as gracefully as possible.

"If you can use a loan—" he began hesitantly, but the other cut him short.

"Don't bother," he told him ironically. "Just trot along, and thanks for your trouble."

Again the devil of stubbornness gripped Barret. He felt an overwhelming desire to wipe the mockery out of that sneering face.

"What do you want me to do?" he snapped.

"Huh? Going to stick after all?"

There was just the hint of surprize in the tone necessary to make Barret throw caution to the winds.

"Certainly, I'm going to stick," he said a trifle stiffly. "I don't start something and not see it through."

Morgan surveyed him casually, sardonically, from his neatly polished round-toed shoes—Barret suffered from corns—to the respectable and highly conservative derby on his head. Barret's clean-shaven, pink and white face flushed with embarrassed irritation. He became uncomfortably conscious of the rotundity under his well-fitting waistcoat, of the well-fed softness of his general appearance, in contrast with the lean hardness of the man whose narrow eyes took his measure with an indefinable, amused contempt.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Better think again, mister," advised Morgan with an impudent grin. "You might get yourself in Dutch, trying to sit in this game. Plenty of time to run along still."

"Look here," Barrett told him, his patience giving way beneath the man's sardonic scrutiny, "if you want me to do anything tell me what it is. If not, tell me so, and I'll wash my hands of you."

The narrow eyes widened slightly in a look which might have been interpreted as admiring surprize.

"All right, have it your own way. I want to get to Moscow. When the train comes in let me carry your bags. I'll try to get aboard in the push, making out like I'm working for you. They're after me pretty hard, but if I can get to Moscow there's a guy there I've got something on, and I'll make him get me out of the country."

"What do they want you for?"

"The less you know the better. I've got no papers, for one thing, and no money. You'll have to pay my fare. But if any one stops me or acts suspicious you don't know nothing about me, see. You just hired me to carry your grips."

"You mean just leave you?"

Morgan grinned.

"You better had," he told him. "Why, man, one week in a Soviet jail would kill you."

Again came the sardonic appraisal, and again Barret's broad face flushed in spite of him.

"Say—" he began, but the words were cut short by a shrill, high-pitched whistle from up the track.

Shawled women with innumerable bundles seemed to rise out of the earth, jostling with heavy-booted stolid men. Gaunt babies screamed, roused from sleep to a world of cold and hunger. Everywhere was bustle and confusion as the long-expected train clattered up to the platform.

With an uncomfortable feeling that he was behaving like a fool Barret followed his companion and the bags toward the nearest carriage. It was just before he reached it that Barret saw him collide heavily with a Red soldier.

There was a quick interchange of words in Russian. To Barret, whose scanty knowledge of the language prevented his being sure what it was all about, it seemed that Morgan was apologising, while the other blocked his way, becoming more and more overbearing. It was one of the petty persecutions to which travelers in Russia are subjected, and which are better not resented.

Then with a sudden sinking at the pit of his stomach he heard one word that his experience with the Soviet Government had taught him to recognize instantly.

"Passport."

Morgan dropped the bags, gave him a

warning glance, and stood rigid, his arm gripped by the soldier.

Barret afterward realized that when he stepped forward his intention was to get aboard the train as quickly as possible, and leave his unwelcome companion to whatever fate might be in store for him, but somehow, in the nervous excitement of the moment, under Morgan's narrowed, cynical gaze, he found himself hastily slipping a fifty million ruble note into the hand of the soldier, with the remark—

"Here's his passport."

The soldier grunted and stepped aside. Morgan seized the bags and boarded the train. Barret followed, weak with relief.

"Well, you've done it," was Morgan's comment.

"Done what?"

There was no need to answer. On the instant a head was thrust through the window, surmounted by a flat, military cap. An instant later another joined it, that of the soldier to whom Barret had given the money. He indicated the two with a wave of his bayonet.

"Drag them out."

It was done, Russian fashion, with kicks, blows and prods of the bayonet. Barret landed on the station platform on his hands and knees. He was promptly kicked to his feet. Morgan followed in the same fashion a second later.

Behind them the train began to move. As one of the carriages passed Barret caught sight of an excited face at a window and heard a voice call something in English. Vaguely he heard Morgan answer. He was too dazed and shaken to understand.

Ringed about with bayonets he watched the train disappear. His bags—that was it. His bags were on the train. Something must be done about it. He couldn't get on without even a razor or a change of linen.

"Come on."

It was the sergeant who spoke, interpreting with a shove that sent him reeling across the platform.

"But look here," he protested wildly, "my bags are on that——"

"Come on, swine."

This time it was a kick, and kicks are a fine art in Russia. Barret picked himself up, sick with pain.

"Don't argue," said Morgan out of the side of his mouth. "Come quietly."

IN THE old days the Karkhova House had been the show-place of the town, the mansion of the local proprietor. Now since the Karkhovas no longer needed it—they were buried somewhere out behind the abattoir—the commissar used it for his own quarters.

It all seemed vaguely incongruous—the colored floor tiles, the rows of long, gilt-framed mirrors, the heavy upholstery, and at the far end of the long room a little, oily Jew who did not even trouble to take his heavy boots off the great mahogany desk.

The soldiers lounged across the room, driving the two ahead of them. Barret was limping painfully from the effects of the kick, and he had lost his hat.

"Well?" remarked the commissar, pausing in the operation of paring his nails to peer at them with black, beady eyes.

"I'm an American," began Barret, but the commissar cut him short.

"Well, you ain't got it nothing on me," he whined in unexpected English. "For eight years I am running a push-cart in New York, yet."

"What you fellers been doing?" he questioned, the almost placating whine of his voice belied by the malevolence of the shifty black eyes.

'I haven't done anything," declared Barret stoutly, the blood mounting into his round, good-natured face. "I was dragged off the Moscow train——"

"Just like me in your —— of a country," whined the commisar. "Me, I am running my push-cart, not hurting nobody. Comes your —— bourgeois cops where a bunch of us fellers has a little club—not hurting nobody, y'un'stand—and runs us in. Me they kick out of your —— country for a Red."

His whine rose to a howl.

"And what if I am a Red?" he screamed. "Ain't the proletariat got no rights a-tall? You bet your life it's different here, yet. Me, I am on the top now, you——"

He launched into a string of abuse, cursing America and everything connected with it. Then his rage spending itself, he turned to the sergeant, and for a moment the two talked in purring, spitting Russian.

"He says this guy ain't got no passports, and that you was helping him make a getaway," he explained to Barret. "You fellers think you can do just how you please. Where's your own papers?"

"In my bag, on the train."

"*Oy gewalt,* that's a hot story. You should make a sucker outa me, yet."

" 'Senough," he decided. "Here in Russia you ain't nothing. We got it a way we should hendle fellers like you."

He whined an order to the sergeant.

"Yes, comrade."

The hearing was at an end. The soldiers closed in about them and they were led out through interminable corridors and passages, thrust through a door and the key turned upon them.

"——," remarked Morgan. "This is a fine mess I've got you into."

Barret made no reply. Dazed, sick and hopeless he stared about the little room with its cracked and stained plaster, its one barred window with a view of a blank wall opposite, and its two cots. It simply didn't seem possible. Here he was, a law-abiding American citizen on a vacation from the wholesale hardware business, locked up in this place at the will of a little East Side Jew. Vaguely he wondered what the folks at home in Zanesville would think about it all.

"Cheer up, bo, you'll soon be dead," remarked Morgan again. "You look like you didn't like this jail."

"Eh, I beg your pardon?"

"I said 'Cheer up.' "

"Oh, not at all, not at all," said Barret vaguely. He was wondering whether he could get word to the American Consul somewhere—or did they have such a thing in Russia?

"Well, have it your own way."

Morgan put his feet up on the cot over which he had previously draped himself and whistled a fragment of rag-time.

"I've seen worse jails," he suggested. "Beds are something, and a blanket is pretty Biltmore for this kind of a dump. Naturally it's lousy, but you can't have everything. What's the matter?"

Barret had risen hastily and was staring horror-struck at his cot.

"Lice?" he managed to gasp, striving with a horrible nausea.

"Sure," assented Morgan cheerfully. "You'll get used to 'em. Takes your mind off your other troubles."

"My ——!"

At home lice were almost risqué. You didn't speak of them in mixed company unless you knew the people very well, and then it was rather bad taste. But actually to have them in your bed—— Of course they had cooties during the War, but somehow it didn't seem quite the same thing.

"Lice!" he moaned again.

"Oh, forget it," Morgan advised him. "This ain't a bad jail. There's lice in all of 'em."

Barret strove to conquer his disgust as he sat down gingerly on the edge of his cot.

"Have you—were you ever in jail before?" he asked hesitantly. It seemed to him a rather personal sort of question.

Morgan laughed ironically.

"Off and on," he said briefly. "New to you? Well, you would do it."

"You speak as though it were my fault," snapped Barret irritated.

"You ought never to have slipped that soldier so much," Morgan explained. "He figured you had more, so he come back after it."

"The dirty crook," muttered Barret at the recollection.

"Oh, he's got to live. He's no worse than the rest of us. Naturally he was going to get all he could. You can't blame him for that."

"You don't blame him for cheating us?"

"—— no. We're all out after what we can get, ain't we? "

"But there's such a thing as common honesty."

"Not where it don't pay, there ain't. The biggest boner you can pull is to trust anybody—provided you ain't got 'em where you can watch 'em, of course."

"Well," said Barret, shocked, "I'm glad I don't feel that way."

"If you had you'd be on the train to Moscow now."

"And where would you be?"

Morgan yawned and grinned sardonically.

"There's something in that," he admitted. "Here we are."

The words brought Barret back sharply to a realization of his predicament. His round, pink and white face fell.

"How long do you think they'll keep us?" he asked.

"Not long, probably. No percentage in feeding prisoners."

"Lucky for us. When do you suppose they'll let us go?"

"Shoot us, you mean."

Barret felt suddenly faint. This contingency had occurred to him of course, but it was different having it actually put into

words—made it seem nearer and more possible somehow.

"But—but we're American citizens," he protested weakly.

Morgan considered.

"Might help," he decided, "if there was any way of getting word to the Foreign Relations Committee at Moscow. Of course there's always a chance that that guy on the train will put it through."

"What guy?" asked Barret hopefully.

"That American. Just as the train pulled out."

Dimly Barret remembered an excited face at a carriage window—remembered hearing Morgan address it. In the strain of the moment it had made no impression on him.

"I guess maybe you was too shook up to pay him any notice," Morgan suggested, noting his blank look. "There was an American on that train. He hollered to know if I was in trouble. I told him yes, but that was all I got a chance to say."

"But he'll take it up when he gets to Moscow," insisted Barret. "He's sure to."

"Well, maybe—if he happens to think of it, and it ain't too much trouble, and he don't figure he'd be safer not to mix in."

"Of course he'll take it up," Barret assured him. "It's bound to be all right."

"Why should he? We ain't got anything on him. And believe me it's a fool's game mixing in in Russia. Dangerous."

"You don't have to tell me that."

"Well, whatever comes we've got a coupla beds," remarked Morgan, stretching luxuriously on the hard, narrow cot. "Gee, it feels good to get in one again. I ain't slept in a bed in a month."

"But where——"

"Box-cars—on the ground—anywheres that I could keep away from the police. I've traveled better than a thousand miles in that time too."

"What did you do to get the police after you?"

Barret asked the question with some trepidation. The general hardness of the man's appearance and talk, the narrowed eyes and sharp sardonic features disquieted him. He might, Barret believed, be capable of anything.

"They got tired of me and run me out."

The tone was brusk, almost offensive. Nevertheless, Barret persisted.

"But why?"

Morgan shot him a sharp, suspicious glance.

"What's it to you?"

Barret flushed and turned away, suddenly hot all over. It had never occurred to him that this man could take him for a spy.

"I beg your pardon," he said icily, and was silent.

For a moment Morgan watched him, his cynical eyes glinting from between half-closed lids. Then he laughed.

"It wouldn't get you nothing to double-cross me," he said. "I'm a —— fool, and I'm sorry. I'm just so used to being careful."

"Don't mention it," Barret told him stiffly.

"Forget it. They claimed I was a Counter Revolutionary, if you want to know. Sheer bunk. It wouldn't have been worth my while. My own game was better."

For the life of him Barret could not stay angry. The man was such a frank, engaging scoundrel that he could not resist his advances.

"What was your game?" he asked curiously.

"Me? I was commissar at Nirdof."

If he had exploded a bomb, Barret could not have been more thunderstruck.

"Commissar? You?" he managed to gasp.

"Well, I'll admit that I don't look much like one now," Morgan conceded, glancing whimsically at his soleless shoes and ragged trousers, "but since they chased me out of that job they've kept me moving pretty fast."

"But—but a commissar! You're a Red, then? A Bolshevik?"

"If it happens to suit."

He laughed cynically at the dismay in Barret's round, pink and white face.

"I guess pretty near everybody's politics depends on what they're going to get out of it. When the revolution started here it looked like pretty good pickings, so I came over to ride it a while. And believe me I rode it right while the going was good."

"But man alive, you don't believe this sort of thing is right?"

"Forget it. There's only one thing that's right, and that to stay on the band wagon as long as it's moving."

"And you thought the Counter Revolutionaries——"

Morgan shot him a glance, full of suspicion.

"I ain't said so," he corrected quickly. "I shot the wrong guy, that's what happened. He had friends with a drag, and they went after my scalp. Kinda looks like they were due to get it."

"You shot him?" The tone was full of horror.

"Well, had him shot. That's what a commissar's for. If you don't shoot a bunch of 'em every so often the crowd down at Moscow begins to think you're a bum. And then—good night!"

They were incredible, the things Morgan told him, sprawled over his cot in the fading light from the one-barred window. It seemed to Barret that he must be dreaming, that it would soon be time to get up and go down to the hardware store. He heard tales of men and women shot down in cold blood for the sake of their clothes or trinkets. He learned of unbelievable official corruption, of the bleak horror of a Russian Winter, when people froze and starved by the thousand in a land of plenty—things he had read from time to time but had set down as the wildest exaggeration until now, when he heard them in Morgan's matter-of-fact unhurried words, interspersed with bits of satirical comment, and backed and intensified by the cynical glint in Morgan's narrowed eyes.

"And that's Russia," said Morgan at length.

"Good ——! And you were a commissar."

"You bet your life I was. It don't take much to put it over on this crowd."

"But Great Heavens! Shooting people——"

"Sure. Somebody would if I didn't. Believe me, the wise guy is the one that does the shooting."

There was a silence. Then hesitantly:

"But do you think they'd shoot us? Without even a trial?"

"Depends," Morgan told him. "That little kike commissar don't like Americans. On the other hand shooting us might make a good deal of a stink—if any one ever heard about it."

"What you doing in Russia anyway?" he inquired suddenly. "Not in any official capacity are you? That would help."

Barret shook his head.

"No, just on a vacation. Thought it would be interesting to see if Russia was as bad as they said."

"Huh, you'll find it's that all right. Married?"

"No."

"Just as well. It's a thousand-to-one shot that bird I talked to on the train will try to do anything for us. It's ten thousand to one whether he can do any good if he does try."

"Of course he'll try."

"Why should he? He may go down and talk to 'em a little, but he won't waste much time over a coupla strangers. I've bumped off half a dozen foreigners in my time as commissar, two of 'em Englishmen. They was food speculators. There never was any come-back about it."

They were interrupted by the key turning in the lock.

"Well, they don't intend to starve us anyway," remarked Barret hopefully as a soldier entered with the evening *pyok* or ration, a piece of black bread, and the inevitable tea.

Under Morgan's cynical gaze he was trying to put the best face on it, and surprizingly, succeeding beyond his expectations, so well in fact that he was able to eat his share of the unpalatable meal with a certain amount of cheerfulness.

"Lord," he said when they had finished, "I'd give something nice for a smoke."

Morgan hesitated, glanced at him, and then reached into his pocket and pulled out a single, bent, twisted cigaret.

"Here," he said.

"Saved my life," Barret told him as he lighted it. Then he noticed something.

"But you're not smoking," he observed.

"No. Don't feel like it."

"But—but—say, was that your last cigaret?"

"Forget it. Do me good to quit smoking a while."

"But look here," cried Barret distressed. "I'm terribly sorry— I didn't realize——"

"'Sall right. I'm used to it. But it's going to be tough on you I'm afraid. You see a feller like you that's always been used to having some money around——"

"But I've got money, plenty of it."

"I thought they'd frisked you at the railroad station."

"They did, but they missed an inside pocket. I've got plenty left."

"Oh, you're all right then. You can

buy pretty near anything you want through the jailor."

"We can," Barret corrected him. "I don't forget a man who gives me his last cigaret. It's share and share alike with us. Say, Morgan, as a hard-boiled cynic you're a frost."

"Have it your own way," Morgan told him with a grin, "but if I was you I'd watch a guy who's too ready to give you his last cigaret. Most generally he wants something—like a chance to share and share alike, for instance."

Barret, whose heart had been warmed to a glow by the incident felt his generous enthusiasm suddenly dampened. The remark fitted so well with Morgan's general attitude toward life that in spite of his normal trust in the decency and fundamental goodness of human nature he had a miserable feeling that perhaps the man was simply using him.

Worn out with the events of the day and disappointed over the cigaret incident he said no more, but conquering his disgust for the vermin-infested cot, lay down and slept soundly until dawn.

HE WOKE to find a gray light filtering through the little, barred window. There was a dull unhappiness in his mind as he struggled back to consciousness which a moment later he identified with Morgan's remark of the evening before.

Strange, he reflected, how a small thing like a disappointment in the character of a man he scarcely knew could have the power to make him so unhappy. There was a dull irritation too. He had been so sure that in the gift of the last cigaret he had a point with which to defeat Morgan's cynical philosophy of every man for himself.

He glanced over at his companion, who lay sprawled on his cot, still sleeping. Raising himself on one elbow he studied the unconscious face. In repose the thin features seemed to lose their hardness. The sardonic quality was gone, and with it had dropped away a good ten years. The man could not be more than twenty-five, he decided—just a pitifully thin, unhappy boy, who had seen things he was too young to see. Into those twenty-five years he had crowded ten times the experiences that had fallen to Barret's lot in forty-odd.

As he looked Morgan stirred and opened his eyes. Instantly his face became what it had been the day before, hard, sardonic, cynical. Barret gasped at the sudden transformation, almost unable to believe what he saw.

"Look here," he began without preliminary, "What you said last night, about why you gave me the cigaret—was that so?

"Still on that? Forget it, brother."

"Well," said Barret stoutly, the memory of what he had seen while Morgan slept strong on him, "I don't believe it."

"Suit yourself."

It was no use referring again to the subject as Barret discovered. Morgan neither affirmed nor denied, but that morning he talked in an even more cynical strain than before. Particularly did he do so when Barret, sticking stoutly to his point made arrangements with the jailor to bring in tobacco and such other small luxuries as were obtainable and insisted on sharing them equally with his fellow prisoner.

The man's attitude of mind began to induce a certain stubborn irritation in Barret. As the day wore on he became obsessed with a desire to wipe that ironic grin from Morgan's face for good and all—to wring from him an admission that this cheap cynicism was a pose. He wanted to like Morgan, wanted to get at the real man that he was sure he would find if he could strip off the shell of hardness with which he had surrounded himself. But the day passed without bringing him nearer his goal in the slightest. It was maddening.

The next morning Morgan began to keep a record of the days by pencil marks on the wall.

"Not that it makes any difference," he explained as Barret commented on it. "Time don't mean anything to us. We ain't going anythwere, but it's just a habit of mine when I'm in jail. You lose track quicker than you'd think."

As the days wore on, each day precisely like the last, Barret began to realize the force of the remark. By the time they had been there a week he would have lost count entirely had it not been for Morgan's calendar.

Three times a day a soldier brought their *pyok* plus the small luxuries that Barret's money could buy. Each day it was a different soldier.

"That's so we won't get to know one of

'em well enough to bribe him," Morgan explained. "They don't take any chances."

"I should think it would be worth their while to put one man they could trust on the job."

"Forget it, brother. There ain't no such animal."

"You're dead wrong," Barret told him earnestly. "You can trust nine men out of ten if you——"

"If you give 'em enough to make it worth their while not to throw you down," Morgan finished with a cynical glint in his narrowed eyes. "Every man has his price, and with most of 'em it's pretty low."

"There's such a thing as honor."

"Maybe," said Morgan indifferently. "But I never happened to see any that couldn't be bought if the price was right.

"Look here," he went on. "Did you ever look at a drop of water through a microscope? You remember how it was? Full of funny looking bugs, and the big ones all eating the little ones? That's what people are. The big ones eat the little ones. Did you see any honor through the microscope? No, and you won't see any anywhere else."

So the talk went, from morning until night, and began again the next morning where it had left off. At times Morgan illustrated his points by drawing on his store of experiences—adventures by sea and land, entirely disreptuable, but diverting in the extreme.

Always they bore out his philosophy of cynicism. Life to him was a simple thing. The strong took in proportion to their strength and survived. The weak went under. Honor, decency, honesty, were names, virtues invented by the few to control the many. A man could be trusted in proportion as it was made worth his while to be trustworthy.

He made no attempt to convert Barret to his creed. He never exhorted or pursuaded, simply talked along in his matter-of-fact way, his narrowed eyes fixed on the smoke that curled from his cigaret.

It was this very matter-of-factness that brought Barret to the point of exasperation. As time went on it became an obsession with him to wipe his companion's face clean of that sardonic grin, to quench the glint of cynicism in his eyes. Invariably it was he who started the argument, and invariably it ended by reducing him to a state of nervous irritation while Morgan remained placidly unshaken in his horrible creed. It seemed to Barret that he would willingly give his life to prove to this pig-headed boy that human beings were fundamentally decent at the bottom, and that the world of rottenness in which he lived was no more the real world than the sewer is the ocean into which it flows.

"Have it your own way," Morgan would remark when Barret in the last stages of exasperation banged his fist into his palm and shouted at him. "When this kike commissar gets ready to shoot us we'll know who's right. Either we'll go out like a candle, or I'll meet you wherever we're going and take off my hat and hand it to you."

It was a sobering thought, the fate that hung over them. A dozen times a day it came into the conversation in some form or other, and each time it was a fresh shock to Barret. In the face of Morgan's apparently placid acceptance of it he tried to feel nonchalant and unworried, but somehow he could never become entirely accustomed to the idea.

"That American you talked to on the train is bound to do something," he urged. "They don't dare simply shoot two American citizens."

"I wouldn't make any bets on it if I were you," was the extent of Morgan's contribution.

IT WAS on the twenty-first day of their imprisonment by Morgan's reckoning that the commissar visited them. He stood in the doorway, his beady black eyes shifting from one to the other without speaking.

Barret's knees suddenly refused to support him, and he sat down heavily on his cot. Morgan, already lying at full length, blew a cloud of smoke in the little Jew's direction and spat contemptuously.

"Comes an order from Moscow," began the commissar in a high-pitched whine.

He stopped maliciously and glanced from one to the other. If he expected a reaction he was disappointed. Morgan blew another cloud of smoke without speaking. Barret was simply incapable of speech.

"One American goes free," said the commissar at length.

"And the other?" suggested Morgan lazily.

"It don't say nothing about the other. I guess we let the pretty ladies attend to him."

"I see. Which one?"

The voice was level and quiet, almost indifferent, but Barret, curiously alive to the detail, saw the cords of Morgan's neck tense and swell, and saw the tiny tremor in the smoke that curled up from his cigaret.

The commisar licked his lips nervously and glanced again from one to the other.

"Don't make no difference to me. The order it says one American. You fellers should figure it out between you."

The beady black eyes gleamed malevolently. Barret tried to speak, but the words refused to come.

"Well?" whined the commissar impatiently.

With horrible clearness it came to Barret that this was his chance: He had only to say the word, and life was his for the taking.

"Come with me," whined the commissar. "One of you. Don't make no difference which."

Great beads of sweat stood out on Barret's forehead. Jerkily he rose to his feet, and as he did so glanced shamefacedly at his companion.

"Atta boy," said Morgan.

It was the look, the sardonic lift of the mouth, the glint of cynicism in the eyes. Barret sat down heavily on his cot, his mind a queer mixture of shame and white-hot rage.

"Well," announced the commissar, "I ain't got no more time to waste. If you can't settle it you'll have to draw for it. Don't make no difference to me a-tall. One American I anyhow get."

To Barret it seemed as though a great weight had been lifted from his chest. The responsibility was no longer his. He glanced defiantly at Morgan.

"Right away I come back," the commissar went on. "In a hat I put a passport and a warrant of execution. You fellers draw for it. One American I anyhow get."

The door slammed behind him. Morgan leaped to his feet.

"You —— fool," he shouted. "Why in —— didn't you go with him. Now I've got to fix it up for you."

Barret was strangely calm.

"Fix it up?" he asked. "How?"

"Listen. A warrant of execution has the Soviet seal on it. When he tells you to draw, feel for that seal, and draw the other one. Understand? Draw the paper without the seal. That'll be the passport."

"But——"

"Don't be a —— fool. I was a commissar myself, and I know."

"But a passport is sealed too. Mine was."

Morgan made a gesture of irritation.

"Not until after you've signed it yourself. They put the seal on after. The paper without the seal is the passport."

"But—but, Morgan, I can't do that you know," he protested weakly.

"You've got to," the other told him fiercely. "Don't be any more trouble to me than you have to."

"But——"

"Listen. You're a respectable guy. Got lots of friends, money, a good home. What am I? Just a bum. Who'll miss me? Nobody. What's life to me anyhow? A rotten, stinking game. I'll be well out of it."

Life seemed very sweet to Barret at that moment.

"We—we'll see," he muttered weakly.

"Atta boy," said Morgan and sat down limply on his cot. "Got a cigaret?"

With trembling eagerness Barret supplied one and crossed over to hold a light for him. Morgan noted the pathetic attempt to be of service with an ironical grin.

"What did he mean by—letting the ladies attend to it," he asked nervously to break the constraint which had suddenly sprung up between them. "You know what he said, 'the pretty ladies.' "

Morgan waved his cigaret airily.

"Oh, nothing."

"Go on," insisted Barret, "tell me."

"Oh, just a way they have. These girls you see around a commissar's office. Fur-trimmed clothes, boots, bobbed hair. Good looking. If they weren't the commissar wouldn't have 'em around. Believe me I know."

"But what do they have to do with it?"

"Why they stick around and dance, drink, flirt with the soldiers—it's a great life, being a commissar. Once in a while when there's a prisoner to be shot he's turned over to them."

"You mean they do the——"

"The shooting? Sure. It seemed to amuse 'em. Queer taste, I'll admit, but

they say it grows on you. You go in and they sit around and talk to you. Give you a drink, maybe. Dance with you if they like your looks. By and by one of 'em croaks you with an automatic."

"My ——!"

Barret felt suddenly sick. Like most travelers in Russia he had heard of such things, but had set them down as wild tales.

"Everything *de luxe*," commented Morgan.

"And you're going to that?"

"Sure. Why not? I've sent plenty of other folks to it."

The key turned in the lock.

"The paper without the seal," cautioned Morgan swiftly. "Don't make any mistake. The one without the seal."

"Well," whined the commissar, "who draws first?"

He held a fur-cap in his hand.

Barret stepped forward, white to the lips.

"I do," he said quietly.

"Well, don't make no difference to me a-tall. I get me anyhow one—and the ladies is waiting."

"Mind what I told you," said Morgan.

To Barret it seemed as if there was only one thing in the world worth while—to wipe that look off Morgan's face.

He felt strangely uplifted, taken out of himself, as he put his hand into the hat, a sort of quiet happiness that made him glow and tingle from head to foot.

Carefully he felt of the two papers—found the one with the seal—held it for a moment, and drew it out. There was a triumph on his broad face as he glanced at Morgan. Slowly he unfolded it, and scanned it.

Slowly the triumph faded from his face and was succeeded by a look of bewilderment. He scrutinized the seal—felt it with his fingers.

"But look here," he muttered perplexed. "But look here——"

Morgan, tense, rigid, moved across the room and scanned the paper over his shoulder. Then of a sudden he went gray and sat heavily, his face twitching.

"But," said Barret stupidly, "I thought——"

With a visible effort Morgan began to speak, and though his face twitched horribly and the smoke from his cigaret wavered his voice was quiet and strong.

"You win," he said steadily. "I don't think there was a man alive who had it in him—that honor stuff. I tried to double-cross you because—" the voice broke a little—"I'm made that way, I guess. But you're made right. You'd have drawn the death warrant on purpose if I hadn't told you wrong."

There was no cynicism in the face now, no hardness. Barret opened his lips, but the other checked him with an upraised hand.

"Will you believe me when I tell you I'm glad things turned out the way they did? Will you believe that? I know I don't look good—" he glanced with a trace of the old expression at the shaking hand that held the cigaret—"but some way I am."

There was an eager wistfulness in his eyes that begged for belief. Barret nodded, unable to speak.

"Thanks, brother. I didn't mean to pull the sob-stuff, but I wanted you to know."

He rose to his feet, still white, but strangely steady, as if Barret's nod had given him a sudden strength, and held out his hand.

"So long," he said, "and good luck."

Then turning to the commissar with the old look—

"Come on, kike, let's meet your lady friends."

MORE THAN HALF A KING

Author of "Mother of Beggars" and "The Inn of the Silkworm Moth."

WATER-BUFFALO wallowed in the mud of steaming ricefields; a great pest of shimmering flies spent the days with them and the nights in the crevices of every thatched roof in Hishiura; locusts battered like hail against closed paper panels or, if the houses were opened to the air, dashed against the lamps ultimately to find the chimney and cremate nastily. Greatest of tragedies, the mission cook had announced to Gilbert Clark that white ants had devoured the bacon, and already borers were to be found in the very bed-posts. One by one the little missionary waved these plagues aside as unimportant; what truly worried him was this:

In a moment of affluence (from the lottery) and parental duty (from rice wine) the pot-cleaner of the horsemeat shop had sent for Yoshi-Ko, his daughter, who had spent her years on a waterbound farm miles distant, and Yoshi-Ko had come to Hishiura. She had gone as one of the ragged urchins that tumbled in the fields; when she returned, eighteen, her father fairly burst with the glory and shone by her reflected light, guessing from her beauty the profit it might be. At last, seeing no marriage for her, being the pot-cleaner's daughter and that she would have no less, he bade her shortly be sold or be gone. All this on her first day in Hishiura.

She felt no obedience toward him, yearned for the farm again, and very naturally went to the temple for advice; when she left, with more than rightful color in her smooth cheeks, the very blind beggar at the temple gate looked at her out of one eye.

It had been bad: it was worse now; the young priests went wild, having seen her. The abbot, Kagamo, tired of their mooning before the fourth Evening Prayer.

"These priests of mine will loll about the garden thinking of everything save devotion," he grunted to himself, and, knowing his pot-cleaner, went into action immediately.

Kagamo appeared in the mud-caked street, wasting no time at all. Would the pot-cleaner accept thirty yen gold as a present? The pot-cleaner would, by the horns of Jizo, and did.

"Fellow," the abbot said, when the last coin had been bitten, "your daughter is too handsome for this street."

"She is," the father agreed vociferously. "And how very dear to me you can never imagine."

"I can very well," Kagamo said shortly. "And I remember that you have thirty yen gold in hand."

"Hai!" cried the pot-cleaner. "You shall have her when you like."

He looked up doubtfully.

"She has not been easy to deal with," he added slowly, fingering the coins as if they might leave him. "Marriage is what she wants."

"Understand this," Kagamo said, frowning, "all will be done with scrupulous care. As for her duty, we will take her before

Yakami-hime, and when your daughter sees that apparition of wonder with the veiled eyes and the thumbs pressed together with awful power, she will remember her duty, I promise you. But, old one, she becomes a priestess, a sacred image, and will be most honorably served."

"Honor, of course, comes into the matter," the father shouted, leering. "I have played the game myself, and know what I am talking of."

To this testimony the abbot had no comments ready, although his mouth moved wryly.

"We come in the morning," he said, and left with that.

The pot-cleaner grinned at the abbot's back, stowed the gold carefully away save one piece, which, after shining it on his nose, he went to test doubly at the inn. At sunset he came home, fuddled, yet not entirely drunk; expansive, and bearing a great basket of food and straw-bound bottles into a hut where rice and a bit of fish was the usual meal. Yoshi-Ko would have been a fool to miss this, even without his babbling.

"It is all for the best," he hiccoughed. "The gods will be good to me now. I shall be as good as a priest any day of the seven. Ho! the wonderful things the abbot spoke of. The terrible images which kill an ordinary man simply to look at. The closed eyes! The thumbs pressed together! The frightful and horrible ——"

He did not know what else, and, by good luck, found his ragged quilts, crept between them, and Yoshi-Ko had a time for quaking.

Terrible eyes in an image frightened her little, but the open ones in live priests she trembled at, remembering her excursion to the temple; powerful thumbs of a god were less to contemplate than living fingers. Yoshi-Ko wanted no priests and no temple: she wanted to get back to the little farm. Had she known the way, she would have walked, and money she had none.

Thumbs pressed together! She visioned, all of an instant, the *seiyo-jin* priest, whom she had seen in the streets; the little plump man with pleasant face, and a smile for all, whether wealthy or poor; how was it he did when he stopped and viewed youngsters at play? How? How? She remembered! First of all he would smile, then bring his finger-tips one to the other, and finally press the thumbs together: Clark's characteristic gesture. It came to her vaguely that he was some god for that reason; gods did that, so her father had said, and so the abbot Kagamo-san must have told him. Therefore she reasoned with what little sense she had left that it was true.

The white priest was a god. There was —no, there was no question of it. She had heard that there was a Carpenter God who lived across the sea. This was the god's servant, or possibly the god himself. All of the village feared this terrible deity and his terror-striking crown of spears, and yet spoke of the queer thing, that he cared for children. She was a child and, childlike, thus swayed.

In noiseless little jerks she crossed the floor, with never a look at her snoring parent, fled into the alley like one of the many shadows and as silent, hugged the dark places until she was out of the street and into the courtyard of the Shinto temple, which she must cross to reach the *sieyo-jin* temple-house: here she paused in her flight, and drew a great hard breath.

The night was starshot, warm; the rice-fields sent up an imperceptible gray mist lustrous as wide-meshed silk, floating in the air and whisping about the cornices of the temple like the body of a ghostly dragon. In the living-quarters lights appeared behind paper panels, and dark spots flitted across them. Slow nasal chants arose; once a bronze door groaned dolorously on rusty hinges and Yoshi-Ko cowered down.

Each bush, each stone lantern, took fantastic shapes to bewilder her. She had no eye for the lakelets that trickled reflected light, nor for the heady perfume of the flowering plants: she burst at last from the spell and, her kimono wrapping about her legs, rushed across the flagstones like a wraithy spirit, the sleeves moving gull-winglike, and found herself, all unknowing of how she had arrived, in Clark's library.

CLARK had heard a light step as he sat dreaming, and turned hastily around, to see a girl bowing and calling him a god. She was so devout, and so horribly frightened, that he was forced to say something before he could gather his Japanese.

"I pray you," he said as beginning: frightened by the strange words she bared her face, her wo and her beauty to his astonished eyes.

"What have they done to you?" he cried

in English also, and, very naturally, patted his hands together, thumb against thumb.

The girl dropped to the floor and beat her head against it.

Clark jumped up, and clumsily drew Yoshi-Ko to her feet.

"Tell me your trouble," he said in Japanese. "This is the house of the gods—" so it was more readily understood—"and I am their servant. You are safe here, child." To himself he added, "Why couldn't this happen on a cool night?"

"It is a word from the gods?" she panted. "That I am safe?"

"I promise," Clark said gently.

She was not satisfied with this.

"Your promise for your gods as well? For the Carpenter-God?" she insisted with downcast eyes.

"Aye, as well as I may," Clark said soberly in English, and translated it for her still more slowly.

Yoshi-Ko nodded her head in her hands, and let this sink in, then stumbled into the story. She came to the august Kagamo's part, which she told as truly as if she had been a witness to the transaction.

"This is terrible indeed!" Clark cried, thinking both of that and of the ensuing complications as well.

She continued the drab little tale to the end.

"And here I am," she ended, as if that settled everything.

"But you may not remain here!" the missionary blurted.

"But—you have promised."

Clark plunged into the icy pool of explanation, and splashed there at large.

"I mean, I mean—he waved his hands in the air for greater emphasis—"it is very difficult to explain. I will find a suitable place for you to live, where you will be safe. But you can not stay here now."

His voice dropped.

"It is very difficult to explain," he concluded lamely.

It was, even to himself. The girl had been bought, and worse, paid for; she was the property of the temple. It was folly to think of smuggling her out of Hishiura and back to the farm.

She met him with childish insistence.

"You have promised for your god as well as for yourself," she reminded him meekly.

"So I did," Clark whispered, and with that forgot all objection.

"You will not let them take me?" she asked again.

Clark bit his lip.

"There are not enough priests in the temple to do that," he said, and meant it.

And so Yoshi-Ko slept for the first time in her eighteen years in a bed, with the cook's wife on the floor beside her. The girl whispered the incantation the woman taught her, and was more soothed by that than by the woman's grim:

"Aei! I know the story, having listened, little bird. Let me tell you this. C'ark-san is a man of his word, and I heard him promise. He is a man of great strength, and his god is not only a god, but a king as well, in his home across the sea."

Yoshi-Ko preferred trusting the new prayer and the strange deity to the paunched missionary, and, mumbling it over and over, was soon asleep.

And so Gilbert Clark had a jewel of price and already paid for, an adornment for any place save that in which she was; not until the first sea wind touched Hishiura and swept apart the ricefield haze did Clark doze, and that in his chair. He awoke again and again.

"I will have the abbot down on me in the morning," he thought, "and what shall I tell him? Yomei—" the cook's wife—"will never hold her tongue, even if no one saw the girl enter. She thinks I'm superior to Kagamo, but I wish I had her assurance. What will I say? I am fairly caught, but possibly for the sake of our friendship he will be willing to allow this girl to leave Hishiura. I certainly hope so. If he does not—" and Clark did not believe he would—"what shall I do then?"

The longer he thought the further he was from decision. The dead morning hour was chill in the room, colder because of the heat behind it and that already pressing close; here and there braziers blazed with charcoal for the morning meal before Clark who slept heavily, yet with one hand clenching and unclenching about the arm of his chair.

HE would have slept none at all had he an ear against the paper panel of the temple's eating-room. The news had come with the first devotee, and Kagamo, sensing trouble uncannily, had entered the priests' quarters, and now cooly surveyed the scene before him.

Many of the younger priests were *kannushi;* they were not celibates, and might return to their homes when they pleased. Some were of rich families, and Kagamo desired that they remain in the temple. All wore the loose black kimono fastened at the waist with a black rope girdle, and their caps were bound about with a white silk fillet.

"I must furnish them with entertainment," the abbot muttered. "The temple is a theater now. All because of this pot-cleaner's daughter. In the old days I might have beaten them, but now——"

He stepped where all might see him. The abbot was never one to dissemble.

"You are talking of the girl?" he asked, and a long, exhaled breath was agreement enough.

"I was thinking of her," he said, and stopped.

A tall gaunt priest bowed.

"We were all thinking of her," he said with gravity, although his voice was shaken.

The abbot smiled.

"It might be better if you thought of your caligraphy, Toyotama," he said mildly. "The last scrolls were imperfectly done."

Toyotama bowed as if this were rare praise, and smiled all over his face. "I see only Yoshi-Ko as I write," he protested.

"Good! Seeing her when absent, you will not need her about."

The priests moved uneasily now, and Kagamo sighed.

"Well?" he added.

"She has gone to the *seiyo-jin's* house," Toyotama said. "Is it permitted that we summon her?"

Kagamo blinked, and recovered himself: so that was it.

"Summon away," he said almost instantly. "But will she come?"

"Is there question of that?"

"No, no. The question is, will C'ark-san be willing?"

"What has that to do with it?" blurted a novice, newly come.

The abbot smiled at him sleekly.

"For speaking out of turn you will ring the great bell at four in the morning for one week, and spend the time between the ringing and the second prayer-hour in meditation on the fact that a tree lives thrice three hundred years because it is silent. Well, Toyotama, the child is silent; speak."

Sullenly:

"C'ark-san took her through incantation and magic. He lit millet-stalk, poured pure rice wine on the flames, and the smoke made her image. She must stay with him, until taken by force. We will take her!"

A glimpse about him, at the agreeing priests, and Kagamo sighed again. He thought of his quiet room, and the *tokonoma* he had been contemplating; thought of the peace of the picture's sweep of green water.

"I have had my last discussion with C'ark-san," he decided, "just as they were becoming interesting.

"Well," he said aloud, abruptly, "you, Toyotama, being the eldest after myself, go to C'ark-san, and ask him if he will visit an old man, and that I will honor him in return by preparing the ceremonial tea with my own hands. And, O, Toyotama my son, I will be gazing on you as you return with him—the proper three paces in his rear, for he is a great priest—and if you mumble under your breath—as you were doing!—I will possibly think of a penance or so, at a time you will not care to be isolated. There—now go for him."

Toyotama went. He found Clark asleep in his chair, although it was well toward nine, with a cup of cold coffee beside him: the house-boy had his orders that coffee was to be brought at eight, and at eight he brought it. Clark woke with a start.

Toyotama delivered his message, none the more graciously for the sound of a soft giggle above.

"I had better get it over with," Clark said aloud, and, in Japanese, added, "I am ready."

For all his vigil, for all his intense thinking now, as they walked toward the temple Clark was utterly unable to plan nor decide. He was uneasily aware of the priest's angry eyes at his back, and felt instinctively that only the abbot's orders had made the fellow simulate courtesy. Toyotama, at the temple gate, led the way past the blind beggar, who mumbled for alms, and added something beneath his breath which Toyotama must have caught, for he kicked suddenly at the mendicant when Clark was not looking.

The abbot greeted Clark cheerfully, bowed Toyotama out of the room and calmly closed every panel. He then uncovered a narrow rectangle cut in the floor, and with a goose feather flicked the edges

of the lacquered hearth, the cinders of which were dyed with tea. Clark, on edge, wished the other would hurry. Gracefully, with the movement of long practice, Kagamo seized a glowing ember from the tripod-supported *hibachi* by means of two silver sticks and fanned them with a branch of spindlewood, sprinkling the whitening coals with incense, which at once perfumed the room pungently. The coals he dropped into the floor-stove, and fanned them rapidly, until the charcoal already in the receptacle began to color rosily. He then placed a metal teapot over the fire, picked up a spatula cut from bamboo and with it deposited tea in a porcelain bowl.

Neither spoke during the ceremony, and Clark strived to make his impatience less apparent. At last the abbot poured boiling water into the bowl, and stirred the mixture until a thick sea-green froth rose to the surface; he then passed the bowl to Clark, who drank a portion, and finally gustily finished the remains himself, down to the muddy sediment. Threads of green moss clung to the inner surface, which the abbot wiped away with a wet cloth. He did the same with the other objects, put each in its proper place, covered the hearth, and sighed loudly.

"Now we may talk," he said in a low voice. "If I could make these children of mine delve into our religion as they do into my own affairs, there would be few unknown gods. The place stinks of secrecy. Now, young fool, tell an old fool what it is all about."

"The girl came——"

"Do I not know that? The point is this: these sons of mine itch to see her, whereas I would like to make them itch from the bamboo! Give us the girl, to whom no harm will come. Answer yes, and we will abandon this foolish subject."

"I—I would like to."

"Then do it!"

"But I—I have made a promise."

"A rash promise is better broken," the abbot remarked. "I am a very old man, and I have had more sorrow from promises kept than from promises forgotten."

"It is between the girl—and myself—and——"

"And your god?" Kagamo concluded shrewdly. "But there the question is, does he know about it?"

Clark was silent.

"Then you have mentioned the matter to him?"

"I mentioned it," the white man agreed miserably.

"The affair becomes simple," Kagamo assured him. "Ask release from your promise. Is that complicated?"

He saw from Clark's face that it was, and hurried on:

"These priestlings can not study nor write nor pray; they read all day of the Thousand and Four Virtues, and spend the night in forgetting them. They are mad, I say. But all youth is mad—and age madder, doubtless! But, C'ark-san, if you do not give up the little pot-cleaner's child——"

"What then?"

"I fear they will take her!"

The abbot paused, and added—

"It is that you are one, and they many."

Clark smiled, and patted his finger-tips together.

"Let them! Let them try!" he whispered, and was sorry for that at once.

The answer came immediately.

"That I will never do" (and the gaunt priest, Toyotama, from his cranny without the *shoji*, scurried away with the news), "that I will never do, unless there is no other way. Return to your house and enter into meditation. Communicate with your god, and discuss the matter with him. If he asks for an offering for the broken promise, I will give it gladly. Back in a forgotten age a master distiller spent a lifetime in making the essence of bamboo swinging in moonlight. I have it. A treasure. Offer that! and more, if need be!

"I will also ask for guidance, and in the meantime preach a bit of wisdom to the priests, to keep them quiet while you pray. There! Do not shake your head. Does your god expect you to be infallible? There—do it for our friendship—meditate upon that which we must avoid, and the love we bear for each other. Both in danger because of that accursed daughter of a condemned pot-cleaner!"

Clark shook his head again.

"Nothing may come of it, true," the abbot said gently. "But you are at least given a morning—to make plans, upon which I can not advise you. I see no other way. Ask guidance."

Old Kagamo's tired eyes grew brighter, and, as if Clark were already gone, the abbot

bent to the matting, divorced from the scene and from animate life as well; his face ice-cold, parchment-like, no visible pulse about the skinny temples to indicate that the heart was beating. To himself he repeated:

"Even as the rain penetrates the roof of a temple long uninhabited, so may passion enter the soul uninhabited by meditation—even as still water which has deposited its slime, let my soul rise, and seek the pathway to the Sun——"

CLARK stood doubtfully for a moment, and then left the room. He realized that Kagamo had given him the morning to get the girl out of sight, or, failing in that, of taking the only other open course.

As he crossed the temple yard he was too abstracted to notice that no priest wandered about or took comfort in the shade; the very pools reflected no form save, in passing, his own. His feet made no sound in the path; he avoided the hot flagstones purposely, yet, as he passed between the great gate and a giant stone lantern, the beggar whispered—"For the lotus of Buddha, for the Lions of Shinto, alms that I may ascend the way of Purification!"

Clark fumbled for a coin, and put it in the bowl beside the beggar.

"Bless me," the beggar added.

Clark smiled into the vacant eyes.

"Aye," he said, and gave the short Shinto prayer.

He added: "You have sharp ears. My footsteps made little sound."

" 'Those whom the gods blind they also recompense," the mendicant agreed in a thin voice.

Clark was thinking that the fellow's ears were indeed keen, to have picked that from the priests' discussions. By now the missionary had reached that point where the circling hedges forming the outer wall of the temple yard converge closely, just past the gate, and out of sight of the temple buildings.

"I am thinking about everything save the true problem," he muttered as he neared the point of convergence of the shrubs.

A step or two more, and he reached the narrowest spot of the path, the bushes a bare arm's length apart, the path concealed from temple and village street by a sudden turn.

He paused here an instant, full of the thing which so troubled him; he lifted a foot to continue on his way, when a bare arm flicked out like a lizard's tongue and the missionary disappeared into the green of the thicket.

There was an instant's rippling of the leaves, a sudden distortion of the hedge's shadow on the hot dust of the path, possibly a shake or two (moments later) of a branch nearer the temple. The temple yard itself remained empty of everything save heat.

The beggar moved counter-clockwise into the shade of the gatepost, and propped his back against it. He listened intently, and the film of doddering blindness seemed to lift from his eyes. The sky was without cloud, and glowing white at the edge; he crossed his hands into a pillow and sprawled at ease.

"*Hai*, but there is a something about," he said lazily. "If it were not that I am supposed to be blind, I would look into the matter. This trade of mine has its drawbacks. I have been discovered before, but there are plenty of temples to move on to. Ho! when I think of that fool Toyotama, who offered to pray for the restoring of my sight! and I almost became a priest! Toyotama—hmm—he kicked me this morning, and possibly with reason, although I do not know what it was; I said nothing to anger him. *Mah!* but the rats play, while the abbot is a-praying—and I know it——"

He was about to add that he did not care, and envied them the performance, when he turned half, and found Toyotama watching him out of one wicked eye.

The priest had rolled, noiseless, out of the hedge which he had never left, as the others did with Clark; his face lay sidewise on his hands, an eye shrewdly on the beggar. The mendicant, frightened, considered him out of the corner of his own, wise enough instantly to attempt concealment. As unconcernedly as he could he got up, stretched himself with elaborate ease, and strolled off along the edge of the thicket. Toyotama followed him; he affected not to know it and tapped a slow way with his staff: his heart began to quicken at the ceaseless cat-step behind, and—ten paces taken—when the priest was close to him he must turn and face the other.

Toyotama pushed him against the hedge, and the mendicant laughed nervously. The laugh stopped abruptly as an unseen

hand, showing that all of the priests had not departed, whipped him into the leaves and flat upon his back in utter concealment, to see—for a moment—ink and scarlet clouds, where none had been before. As the fellow gradually became conscious and aware of the green about him, aware of the legs of two men, he heard a voice also.

"Now he can hear—" Toyotama's voice—"and hearing, will understand. He has played at being blind, and blind he shall be. Then let him babble as he will—who will believe?"

The rest was lost. Neither Toyotama nor his fellow had realized that there could be such furious strength in the scrawny brown-leather body: the mendicant had thrown himself at them in a wild attempt at escape, understanding their purpose fully.

Before the matter was over a knife slipped gently in and past the mendicant's rags.

The priests hurried back to the temple. Let the fellow stay where he was until night, when his body might be disposed of satisfactorily. Should he—or what was left of him—be accidentally found, what of that? There might be, true, early and long prayer-hours, to atone for the desecration to the temple gods through the shedding of blood at the very gate; there might (and doubtless would) be an intolerable burning of incense and ringing of bells and bowing until one's back ached, but what of that, either? There were other affairs ahead, after which the mendicant might be stuffed underground to join any ancestors his soul could remember.

The two priests spat thrice as they crossed the courtyard, that the spirit of the beggar be prevented from pursuing them; this little ceremony complete, both strode along in high good humor toward the sleeping quarter: at a gay word from his brother priest Toyotama cackled shrilly.

Possibly the abbot had completed his meditative devotion, possibly he had been alert with all the prayers; at all events he dropped the enormous Fourth Book which he was holding. He said nothing, but his brows drew together with annoyance; picked up a long-stemmed pipe and filled it with silky Japanese tobacco, lighted it, took the four puffs which consumed the contents of the bowl and, still frowning, drew his cord-girdle tightly about him and stepped swiftly from the room and down the corridor, as silent as a puff of smoke.

A priest, hidden securely in a dark corner, watched him go, and sped after him; watched the abbot clear down the dim hall, past the series of short teakwood steps, through the door with its rearing animals and carved chrysanthemums, and at last into the altar-chamber itself.

The priest worked his silent way close. He saw the abbot strike his hands together three times; sharp, dry, echoing sounds in the quiet room; saw him advance on hands and knees to the table of offerings, heard the inhalation as the old man drank sacred wine from the unbaked earthen cup and, thus sanctified, bow before the gilded Nichirin of the Sun. He heard him recite the first of the intricate thousand words of Perfume, to reach the last of which, even for a hungry novice after a fast, takes two long and concentrated hours. The spying priest heard him through the First and into the Second, then grinned with satisfaction and fled as noiselessly as he had come, also seeking the sleeping-quarters.

LEAVES shimmered like brown gauze burnt by the sun; even cicadas tired for once of their song; the fountain shone, the displayed Apes, jetted their crystal store; every panel was closed to the furnace-heat. Once *geisha*, a motley of orange and blue, carmine and yellow, massed in a hot spot of color as they met and wandered solemnly to the bath.

Yet for all the heat, Hishiura was not to be guessed for the hot-bed it was: the very coolies in the fields stopped and talked, a thing that had not happened since the rice-riots. Yoh! but the *seiyo-jin* priests had set himself against the temple—and what would come of that? Some said that they had seen a bird as large as a horse, bearing sacred symbols, fly above the fields, but that was never proved. But something would happen, although none knew just what, nor how.

The priests, awaiting the return of Toyotama, felt that something was about to happen also, nor did they know clearly what. But talk of it they did. They were haggard or laughing, according to how the matter hit them; one was inspired, he showed the whites of his eyes, spumed at the lips, began to mutter, with gurglings in the throat. As Toyotama and his fellow-priest entered the room, the fellow's words burst strangling from him.

"O torture of fire! O horrible death!" he stuttered with a finger on high see-sawing the rhythm. "O devils and seventy demons of hate!"

He dropped plump in a fit, and they smothered him in a quilt, lest his voice be heard beyond the room.

Toyotama looked about him grimly.

"Well," he said, "I thought I told you to be silent."

They had been, save the quilted priest, and said so bluntly.

Seeing Clark watching alertly, Toyotama grinned.

"We will speak in Chinese," he said, in that language, "which, being priests, you all know. Thus the *seiyo-jin* will not understand."

He laughed as Clark attempted to follow the words, and gave himself up to a moment of enjoyment watching the white man.

Clark was aware of Toyotama's scrutiny, and sat restless under it. He was unbound save about the mouth: here a thick piece of silk prevented him from making outcry. Hemmed in completely by priests, he sat as they did, on the matting; with Toyotama's eyes on him he tried with difficulty to appear nonchalant, uninterested, at ease, but more than once he fidgeted nervously.

The white man's head ached, and every nerve jangled from the sudden assault and capture by ungentle hands; he knew where he was: the priests' sleeping-rooms, and that none dared enter there; that whatever happened would be unprevented. That he had only himself as aid.

Toyotama, still in Chinese, addressed the men:

"We have C'ark-san. You, Tagahashi, together with Shiki here—" the priest who had been with him in the courtyard and at the hedge—"will, when it darkens, go beyond the great gate, on the far side of the hedge, to a place Shiki knows of, and dispose of what you find there in the simplest manner. Now we are all here. The abbot is—where?"

"He prays," the spy assured. "The thousand words of Perfume, before the great altar."

"Excellent. We have ample time. Listen, then. In the old days, when a priest was more than a prayer-machine—as is proper!—we would not need so much secrecy and so many words. We would go to the house of this foreigner, and take what we wanted. But to do it now is more difficult. He would complain, and sooner or later a word would come from Tokio, after which there might be trouble.

"So we must be crafty. Clever. Careful. What we will do is this: C'ark-san is to be asked to write a letter to his house-boy, who understands foreign writing. He is to write it in Japanese as well, so we may read what he has said. No—that will not do—he might say two very different things, and we never realize. He will write it all in Japanese, without another mark on the paper save his name, which must be in his own language, since that is how he always signs it. Then we take the message to his house. It says, 'I desire the girl. Send her with the bearer.' Nothing more."

"How would you know his name?" from one of the priests. "He might write a word or so of warning in his own writing, and say it was his signature."

Toyotama scratched his head.

"I have seen notes of his to Kagamo, and will recognize it. To be doubly certain, we will search his pockets, and find handwriting of his own, and doubtless his name at the end of it. And—" grimly—"for that matter, if he will not sign, we will do it for him. Have we not duplicated signatures for the pottery works that even experts could not detect?"

"Why not detain him, and write all of this note ourselves?"

They divided into two camps on this and Toyotama felt his control over them slipping, a control but newly won.

"*Hai!*" he shouted, and instantly lowered his voice. "There are objections! Who is leader here? Had I not spoken, you would have done nothing at all, save talk, talk, talk. I say mine is the better way—" louder—"and that is the way it is to be done!"

He waited for nothing more, but faced Clark, explaining in a dozen words what was wanted.

"You will write this letter, and sign it as well. We will verify the signature."

To a priest—

"Get pen, for this fool can not use a brush, and grind ink for him."

"No," Clark said huskily, speaking through the silken gag.

"You will not?"

"I will not do for you what I have refused your abbot."

Toyotama grinned.

"Possibly not. But the abbot and I use very different methods."

Clark trembled.

"Write it ourselves," insisted the objector, but, sensing a climax from Toyotama's working face, the others snarled him down.

"You will write it," Toyotama said very gently.

The white man did not answer.

"I say you will write it!"

Toyotama jumped to his feet, as the priests shifted their positions on the floor at Clark's shaken head. He waved a hand to include them all.

"You hear!" he said, in throaty Chinese. "Where, I ask, does much of the money go, that should come to our temple? To this fat little slug. See his paunch! Good food and drink from the money which is rightfully our own. Look at me—" banging his skinny chest—"empty, that this foreign skin may be plump. Is he content to take our money? Is he? Ye know best. Now he breaks our power, by taking a maid who should be our own!

"The abbot is old. He is absorbed in the learning of years, and no longer cares. Are you as tired of this as I? It is not that I say to be reckless. If that were it we would take her bodily. But we must break the power of this foreigner to our will as well, or we have done nothing at all.

"What we will do is this—" he looked about, and saw every face eager on his own—"we will insist, as best we can, that C'ark write as we desire. I say, *insist.* Possibly he will do as we ask, being filled with fear. If he does, the matter ends. If he does not—insist we will—and he can have a sleeping-quarter beside the beggar in the hedge."

"There will be questions!"

"Questions? Yes, but what kind, woman-heart? The letter will cause any skeptic to believe that he has taken the girl away. That he has already departed. Depart he will, but alone." Toyotama laughed. "Or possibly the beggar will wait to keep him company."

"And then——"

"And then, fool? If the abbot wonders, he will do no more. Possibly bell-ringing, and praying, and bead-telling, but with what recompense at the end. Even the Buddhists will never doubt our power, after the *seiyo-jin* has bowed to it. The girl is a pot-cleaner's daughter, and knows nothing; C'ark may tell much, if he becomes a god—but who listens to gods these days? And we have a new tea-server of grace, and also our power again, undisputed."

"Why not write the letter ourselves?" the objector repeated, but without his former emphasis.

"And permit the white man—there is always a chance!—to prove that he did not write it? My way is the best. It is the best. I say it is the best!"

And he was agreed with by excited eyes.

Hai! but Toyotama was correct; it was permitted that foreigners took what they desired; C'ark-san was well fed with food that should have lined their own bellies. They grew hungry from the very thinking of it.

"Begin! Begin!" they chorused, and, victorious, Toyotama nodded.

"Brother," he said to a short, fat priest, "brother, blow up the brazier."

The priest, his cheeks like bladders, blew the coals to a white heat.

"Now, then," said Toyotama, "we are ready to begin."

Clark saw what was in the wind, saw also, and bitterly, what his own course must be. Whatever happened, he would not allow himself to be ridiculous; it would be ridiculous for a missionary to struggle with a half-hundred priests, but suffering was never ridiculous. He anticipated Toyotama's intention; he was white enough now in the face, froze hard. He sat where he was, arms crossed, his wide blue eyes fearful and blinking, but firm, and as cold as his face.

The moment they unbound his mouth:

"I will not deny you your amusement," he said slowly and steadily, "but I doubt if you can make me do what you ask."

Toyotama wrinkled his nose.

"We will see about that," he said smoothly, and; largely from curiosity, did not order Clark's limbs bound.

The missionary kept his word.

A red cinder hissed a moment later upon his lips; he shut his eyes, ground his teeth together, sweat beaded his forehead and glistened in his hair. Once he reeled over, and would have fallen if the watchful priests had not pressed closely (their breath hissing like the coal); he said nothing, and did not motion them to stop. Toyotama was annoyed.

When the coal was removed Clark mumbled, as best he could—

"You disgust me with your monkey tricks."

And this hurt Toyotama, for it made him feel the fool.

Clark forgot the agony of his scorched mouth, forgot everything but this ineffable achievement, this triumph, that he had withstood the pain; he felt it a great hour, this in which he could not be forced, and where he had taunted them beside.

"That," said Toyotama, by way of retort, "was merely the vinegared fish before the meal," and Clark shivered.

The ring of brown faces watched closely. Expertly, they discussed the manner in which Clark had taken the torture; did it with many a "*yoh*" and "*hai*" of excitement, many hissing breaths. Who wanted a play, with such a performance at hand, and real into the bargain? Toyotama, understanding them better than they understood themselves, had lacquered tables set out; squat bottles of rice wine and foreign brandy began to circulate; the air in the closed room grew fetid from body-odor and many pipes or cigarettes.

A priest peeled and ate an orange, and the sweet smell became nauseating to the white man. Clark swayed as he sat, but watched Toyotama with fascinated eyes, watched his every movement with unabated firmness, into which a great hatred was creeping.

"Next," breathed Toyotama, "next we will——"

"Stand up, and I'll thrash you," Clark said thickly between his burnt lips.

"Priests do not fight," Toyotama told him. "You do—they call you the fighting priest, whereas you are really none at all! Well, then, fight. We, however, are more delicate in attaining our ends." He laughed. "Now we are about to bring you to realization of what faces you here. Off with that coat of his!"

It was off.

"And the shirt—both of them! *Hai!* but they wear many fine clothes, bought with our money! Now, down with him, brothers!"

They had him pegged out on the floor, face downward, his mouth to the matting. A priest at each hand, one at each foot, with the rest crowding about. Behind him, only, was a narrow space, and, at a word from Toyotama, a burly priest approached the opening, in his hand the bamboo handle of a straw broom. Clark could not see him, yet realized the other's advance; his stop; his silent laugh.

"We will see when this boasting fighter is prepared to do what we wish," Toyotama growled. "When you are ready to write, C'ark, say so!"

Every eye bore on Clark's white back.

"Delicately, delicately," Toyotama cautioned the fellow with the bamboo. "Use discretion. Above all, brother, be delicate. Withstrain your arm. Merely a touch upon him. You know how. A touch only. As delicate as the fall of a blossom to the water of a pool!"

A long breath from the priests.

"Ready?" Toyotama asked.

The burly priests nodded eagerly.

"Begin!"

So lightly that it seemed child's play the bamboo rose and fell—always on the exact spot it had touched before. Up—down—up—down, regularly, easily, softly; a game. A gentle game. Never did the burly man increase the power of the impotent blows, never quicken, yet, before the hundredth, the spot upon which each fell began to darken redly, to puff and flame, and Clark's breath came quick and fast.

Up—down—up—down. Neither fast nor slow, but as regular and easily as a pendulum swinging, and with no more force.

Clark clenched his hands about those of the priests that held them. A second man was told off to each arm. The white man's fingers tightened as the blows continued, and his nails dug into the hands of a captor, making semi-circular marks when the priest violently shifted his hold, and pinned the hand to the floor where the fingers might not reach him. Clark balled his hand to a fist.

Up—down—up—down.

One of Clark's nails, in the clenched hand, more brittle than the rest, snapped.

He tried to think, of anything, anywhere, any one, save this unreality. To hold his mind to his own room. To a book he had read, of people he had known—of a tree in the temple yard—of the old abbot Kagamo—he wished his brain would cease functioning, and that he might forget this awful increasing agony across his back. Forget the agony——

Watchful Toyotama, biding his time,

broke the spell with an uplifted hand, at which all of the men sighed loudly. The beater withheld the bamboo.

"Will you write?" Toyotama asked. "And promise to speak no word?"

"I will—speak no word," Clark gasped. "None would—believe—that there are such beasts. But—I will—not write."

The burly priest shifted his position to Clark's side, and, at a signal from Toyotama, began again. The blows, light as summer rain, powerless as the first, fell across the puffed flesh at right angles, bringing a spot of pain where the two crossed that was (Clark thought) intolerable and not to be long borne. At the intersection a tiny drop of blood showed, but nowhere else was the skin broken.

The white man writhed, tore dreadfully at the hands which bound him, forgetful of everything save the horrible pain.

"Soon he will remember nothing save that he must escape from the torture," Toyotama whispered hoarsely. "Then he will write. Is it not well done?"

It was well done.

Up—down—up—down; always gently, softly. As soft and muffled to the ear as the far distant bell of the Buddhist temple to which, for a minute, the muscular priest slowed his blows to keep time. Soft, as Toyotama said, as the drop of petals to a paved pool.

THE abbot looked up at Nishi-rin of the Sun contemplatively. "That priest," he said aloud, "needs no flute to announce his coming and going. His feet are as heavy as Uzume's dancing in the rock cave.

"Do these children of mine think I do not know the temple yard was empty? And that I was watched? Am I grown so old as that? Well, O goddess, it seems as if the Thousand Words must remain unuttered, for—" heavily—"I believe I have other and more important employment ahead. It comes to my mind that these boys, being infants, so to speak, are either on their way to the house of my friend C'ark-san, or, if they have rushed there quickly, are on the return path, with an extra member to the party whose kimono is not black. I believe, O goddess, that I will go and meet them, if you will permit me to have them recite the Thousand Words a hundred times each as penance for my having omitted almost all of them."

He rose to his feet slowly, stepped out and into the hot empty courtyard and gingerly across the burning flagstones.

"I should be in my room in comfort," he thought sadly. "If C'ark-san meditates at this moment no better than I, we are advancing little enough in our purpose."

As he crossed the templeyard he added—

"Yet I feel certain, through divination that C'ark-san is at this instant calling upon his gods for assistance."

In this last he was correct.

"Why can not these priests be content with the beauty of our temple and garden?" he asked a stone lantern. "Look at the entrancing loveliness of that three-branched pine, exactly like the character for heaven! and the curve of that pool's shore; hai! the labor that there was in making it, when I was a boy. I am too easy with these rascals. And that flash of sapphire and emerald of the kingfisher's wing—where is the jewel to match it?"

He reached a tiny shrine near the gate, drew a red candle from the sleeve of his kimono, broke a short piece from it, pressed the end upon a nailstand, returning the larger piece for future use; bent, drew in his breath, rose, clapped three times, turned to the left and repeated the devotion, clapping, squatting, until he had circled the shrine.

Abstractedly he continued his musing as he passed beneath the great gate:

"Do these babes of mine understand the long, sweeping curve of these hedges? Never in the world. To them it is shrub and branch and leaf, but I know better; I see the ceaseless care that has brought it to the perfection that it is. The cropping and tending of a Master Gardener, until the bushes no longer grow, but stay in the proper shape. It is very beautiful and green—and peaceful—a perfect thing in an imperfect world—and—" stooping to pick up several broken leaves— "these priests pluck off the leaves as they pass, and litter the walk with them—ho!—" a pace forward—"here are more—I intend speaking of this. I do indeed. I must retain the evidence, or they will claim I saw what was not.

"Into my sleeve with them—mah! but they are sharp! They scratch and I am too old for unnecessary discomfort. I shall place them beneath the hedge, and mark the spot with a white pebble or two."

The abbot was exactly at the place where the blind beggar had disappeared, and, in the disappearing, torn bits of leaf from the shrubbery. Kagamo cast about, found a pebble to suit him, stooped, started to place the leaves beneath the hedge and mark them, when suddenly he straightened up.

"Gods of heaven and earth," he grunted, "what have we here?"

His old puckered face twitched, his eyes twitched, his pursed-up lips worked together.

"I must look further," he whispered aloud. "And I fear to. It—it will be C'ark-san. The priests are more eager than I guessed. I must look—but I fear I will find my good friend——"

And with that he hunched down and peered again beneath the hedge.

He remained in that position for a second, then scrambled under, and his puff of surprize shook the very roots.

When he emerged, his face was as sand-colored as the path upon which he stood. He said nothing, and his face seemed to be deeper lined; he stood facing the hedge, his hands, like his eyes, twitched; yet, from all three, it was clear in some strange way that inside his head was no indecision, and that he but waited for his shocked frame to move him as the brain directed.

He shuffled away, very slowly, yet upon feet which tried to hurry for him, moving with visible, with painful effort, toward his room in the temple. He did not stop, as is proscribed, at the shrine, but passed as if the god had no home there; indeed, as if he did not exist at all.

CLARK mouthed nothings, he was almost wild from the softly-falling bamboo blows, and yet, at intervals, was able to gasp that he would write nothing and, finally, to curse them when asked. It took but a word or two, that last, and he was actually unaware that he damned them horribly. Once he wished, in a lucid interval between blows, that he had gone down fighting, instead of suffering this lurid pain.

Up—down—up—down.

The bamboo-wielder, the burly priest, panted now from the continuous exertion, and Toyotama beckoned another to take his place. The torture continued; better, it was more exact, for the new man brought the stick down with absolute precision along the ridge; still the skin was unbroken, save for the tiny drop-trickle at the intersection of the ridges, but it reddened steadily, angrily, it puffed outward as if containing fire prevented from flaming only by the continued pressure of the blows.

As the minutes passed Clark felt he could stand no more.

And yet the minutes passed, and Clark stood more. His muscles contracted to snapping-point, his eyes rolled and showed the whites, he frothed at the mouth—suddenly the chalkwhite face suffused with blood.

"He will not know," Toyotama husked. "Now is the time—paper—so—release a hand—hold the pen against his fingers—good!"

To Clark persuasively:

"It is over. There will be no more. You may rest. Come—write as I tell you—write what I say—then you will have peace——"

The white man weakly raised the released hand, and struck out blindly at the face so close to his own. He had no words, was unconscious of the intended blow, which did not even reach Toyotama's face. Clark's head was partially raised, also, and, at the same moment as the hand motion, froth from his lips disengaged and touched the gaunt priest's face—greatest of insults.

"Yoh!" Toyotama screamed, his face twisted with rage, and lifted a food-stand, of heavy wood-and-lacquer, to dash it into Clark's raised face.

The weapon rose high, and, as if suddenly metamorphosed to a bronze thunderbolt in the hand of Kaminari, the Thunder God, remained there.

A shuddering sound came from the priests; it began low and hollow, ran up to a hiss; then the silence was such that a groan, weak, half unuttered, from the prostrate white man broke into the room like the surging of some unsuspected wave.

The abbot's voice came cold, a wind from wintered Fujiyama; a thin, chill stream, before which Toyotama wilted and shriveled visibly.

"O soulless dog!" it said. "There will be no mercy for a coward, and less for him who is merciless. A blind beggar has joined his gods, sent by the doubly blind. The gods watch, Toyotama! The knife was quick, but the gods are quicker than your hand. They held the blind beggar to life after you

left him. For life long enough to write upon the sand! Your name, Toyotama. And where to find you! He must have heard you, O more than blind—O desecrator of god and temple—" he waved the great curved blade which he had gone to his room for—"I have it in my mind to end it here. But I have been advised differently. You are the eldest of the priests, and my years are few. In days, or months, you would have become abbot. As you have strived for. But now—" he paused and licked his lips, lowering the sword until the point was on the floor again—"now, that is passed. Your life is wasted. The hopes of years is vanishing for you—it is gone."

His old voice rose and cracked—

"Go forth, and kennel with the swine!"

The unearthly voice ceased.

Toyotama felt panic creeping steadily up his legs, to loosen the joints of his knees.

Yet for all his fear and surprize his brain worked rapidly. It told him, in a flash, that all of the priests were together with him, even if here he was singled out as ringleader, and that they must stand by him. It told him that here and now his life was truly wasted, for the abbot would force him to leave the temple unfrocked—to become a mendicant, like the beggar who had squatted by the gate. Clark, backed by Kagamo, might even cage him in a jail.

He thought no longer.

Toyotama whirled a half turn, and faced the abbot, stepping on Clark's up-turned, outstretched hand as he did so. Lifted the heavy food-stand a scant inch higher, and poised it.

The abbot attempted to bring the sword to bear, regretting that even in the split-second of warning he had not brought the weapon to a position of defense. He had the blade barely in the air, a foot or so from the ground——

Toyotama's muscles tensed, as the food-stand began to swing downward, to add strength to the blow. Once must do it; the priests stood bewitched, but they might not stand for more.

Clark reached out the hand upon which Toyotama had stepped; it closed about the ankle of the priest. Held. Pulled and tore at it with furious, demoniac power. Toyotama, engrossed and poised for the blow, lost balance, attempted wildly to keep his feet, fell forward, and found the up-turning blade of the abbot's sword waiting for him.

There was a second of gasping silence, and then the priests stampeded from the room. The abbot dropped the hilt of the sword, as if it were distasteful to him because of its burden at the point, and, with no look at the fallen priest, shuffled to the white man's side.

"I—will not write," Clark whimpered brokenly.

"You need not," the abbot whispered to him and, with sudden energy, picked up the little missionary and carried him from the room.

The sunlight in his eyes aroused Clark for an instant, as the abbot carried him across the courtyard and toward his own room in the temple.

"I should have fought, I should have fought," the white man muttered between his scorched lips.

The abbot laughed unsteadily.

"You did. You did indeed," he said, and, stumbling once or twice on the uneven flagstones, carried his burden into the cool of the temple.

STIMULATING EARLY FUR HUNTING

by Leon Rowland

TWO hundred dollars a year salary, with all expenses paid, were offered hunters to go to the headwaters of the Missouri and the Rocky Mountains, in an advertisement appearing January 15, 1823, in *The Missouri Republican*, a newspaper published in St. Louis.

The advertisers, "Ashley and Henry" were, however, prepared to invest $20,000, for they asked for 100 men to enter their service. Approximately that number were secured and started up the Missouri in boats on March tenth, to spend at least twelve months as fur seekers in a region of which the only civil government at that time was an "Indian Agent for the Upper Missouri," appointed by the President of the United States.

DON'T SWAT A FLYER

A Complete Novelette

by Thomson Burtis

Author of "Haunted Skyways," "The Moment of Greatness," etc.

"HASHAWAY" LEWIS, gentleman of color and chief factotum of the bachelor officers' mess, had developed a system of his own for coping with the problem of breakfast. The flyers of the Mechanics' School had individualistic ideas regarding the breakfast hour, and likewise concerning the proper way to serve an egg.

It was Hashaway's custom to keep his good eye peeled and cocked in the general direction of the quarters, which adjoined the mess-hall. When a flyer hove in sight Hashaway identified him, exploded two eggs into a waiting frying-pan and dispatched Taylor, his unreliable assistant, to the table with grapefruit and coffee. Taylor, commonly known as the "Ethiopian Reptile," was an eminent exponent of the art of throwing sevens and likewise of doing the least work possible under any given conditions.

On this particular morning Donovan Field, the largest flying field in the world, had been up and about its business for an hour or more when Hashaway's weather eye beheld a tall and lounging gentleman approaching the mess-hall.

"Quick, nigguh—heah come Lootinint Brannon," he warned Taylor.

Taylor left the coffee pot flat and leaped for the ice-box, where Brannon's private glass of grapefruit juice was waiting. Brannon "sho' had principles about vittles," as Hashaway frequently remarked.

The four belated airmen who were tinkering with their breakfasts greeted the new arrival in rough morning voices.

"Well, how's the near civilian this morning?" inquired "Slim" Evans, who was six feet four and could crawl through the eye of a needle.

"Pretty fair," returned Brannon casually, "except that I'm a bit worried about Russia."

The newcomer was tall and slender and languid. His long, thin, deeply tanned face had a whimsical touch which was the result of a slightly one-sided smile and sloping eyebrows which almost met in a V above his aquiline nose. His dark eyes were large and sleepy-looking and ordinarily were shielded by eyelids that drooped heavily. One of the lines from nostrils to mouth turned into a deep wrinkle on its way around. Although Brannon did not look thirty-two, which was his age, his quizzical countenance was that of a man who had seen and experienced much.

He moved with a certain careless ease, dropping into his chair and leaning back in total relaxation. He was plainly a man who took things easy.

"You look debauched this merry morn, Slim," he remarked. "You're nothing but a human hangover right now."

"I'm a walking headache," admitted Evans morosely. Then, "What the —— are you getting out of the Army for, Jim?" he burst forth querulously.

"Just fed up," returned Brannon, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. He eyed Slim with the invariable tinge of mockery which was characteristic of him. "I told you three weeks ago, on just such a beaming morn, that I was through."

"Uh-huh. If there's anybody here that hasn't announced the same thing at least forty times a month since he got in the Army, let him speak!" said little Fred Granger. "But this lazy looey walks in one morning, calmly says he's through, and then breaks every tradition of the Army in general and the Air Service in particular by walking up to headquarters and resigning forthwith, immediately and without delay! That's no way to act. It's sacrilegious."

"It's worse than that—it's ridiculous," stated red-headed Morrison. "You leave us and your uniform flat this very morning, don't you? Somebody said your papers were in——"

Brannon shook his head as he put down his empty glass.

"Everything's set, but I persuaded the major to hold off until Monday and let me fly down to Lockville for the week-end. I want to see a friend of mine, and the trains leave and arrive at ungodly hours."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Grayson. "Got a job?"

"—— forbid," grinned Brannon. "I'm going to Tampico to see a friend of mine who's got a scheme."

"You and your friends!" jeered Evans, rising from the table. "Is there any known nook of the earth where you don't know somebody? First it's some actor at the Majestic, next a bird blows in on a freight train and inquires for you, then a full general butts in for an inspection and greets you like a long-lost brother. You sure have a varied collection of mysterious acquaintances."

Slim's tone reflected a certain mystification which was characteristic of the entire personnel of Donovan field regarding the languid, easy-going, incorrigibly facetious Brannon. Although most of the flyers, particularly the bachelors, were somewhat casual young men themselves, Brannon's sudden decision to resign was so utterly unexpected, and had been carried out with such promptness, that it added the final touch to their wonderment about him.

His conversation had given glimpses of many strange places and people about the world, and it was plain that he had lived a rather extraordinary life. Any effort to plumb the reasons for his having been a carnival spieler, for instance, met with a reply as unsatisfactory as his answer to the question regarding his reasons for resigning so suddenly.

When asked how he happened to be in Dayton, Ohio, during the flood, or in Columbus, New Mexico, two days after the raid of Mexican bandits in 1916, his smiling answer was always to the effect that he had just dropped in to look things over.

Naturally, not a one of them believed that, entirely, any more than they believed that being suddenly "fed up" had caused him to resign on two hours notice. But in each case Brannon had told the exact truth.

"Well, we'll see you Monday, I suppose," said Evans from the doorway.

"I'll be galloping about the field a few hours," Jim nodded.

"Watch out for these last flights, old man," remarked Grayson. "See you Monday."

The others drifted out, one by one, leaving Brannon to finish his breakfast alone. There had been an undercurrent of real regret in their words, and Brannon smiled to himself as he thought of them. They were a good gang—he really hated to leave them. But the time had come to move on.

BREAKFAST having been stowed away safely, he went over to the quarters, quickly packed a suitcase and set out for the hangar housing the flying department of the school. He walked up the road which separated the long row of hangers from Field One. On the other side of the field, westward, an equally long row of unused barracks separated Field One from Field Two. The mile-long row of shining white hangers bounding the northern edge of Field Two was paralleled by the ships on the line—there were fully sixty of them in precise formation, facing the hangars. Dozens of other aircraft, ranging from slow training ships to fast little scouts were droning over the great two-mile-square airdrome.

The Mechanics' School ships were also on the line, half-way up the field. Because it was the duty of the school to make airplane mechanics out of raw material, every type of ship was represented there. Students must be familiar with great four-ton,

twin-motored Martin bombers as well as tiny Fokker scouts. Out on the field the airmen assigned as instructors were taking off, landing, and probably cursing continuously, teaching the cadets in the back seats how to handle a ship. Further on up the field classes in rigging were swarming around various types of planes, all dismantled, trying to put them together again.

Brannon called the sergeant in charge of the line and handed him the suitcase.

"Which Fokker do I take?" he inquired.

"Number 4, sir," replied the sergeant, glancing at the list in his hand. "Do you want to hop off right now?"

"Uh-huh. Warm her up and get the suitcase wired on, will you?"

"Yes, sir. I understand you're leaving us."

"Right, sarge. The Army'll have to struggle along as best it can. I hope no foreign nations take advantage of my resignation and start a war."

The stocky, weather-beaten sergeant grinned.

"Sorry to see you go, sir. She'll be ready in a few minutes."

Brannon waited on the bench, sharing it with three cadets who were awaiting their turns to fly. In a moment the six-cylinder Mercedes motor in his ship was idling along on the warm-up. He listened casually, trying to detect any faltering in the steady drum of the cylinders. It ran with sweet, even rhythm, and he drew on his helmet and polished off his goggles. The sun was beating down fiercely, although it was not yet ten o'clock. There were occasional respites when one of the huge cumulus clouds which hung in the sky got before the sun. It was humid, and there was not the sign of a breeze.

Probably be some rain before the day was out, Brannon reflected. He wondered whether he ought to call up Matt Downs and tell him he was starting. He decided that it was not necessary—he had already told the Texan he was arriving some time during the morning.

The sergeant looked up from his survey of the instrument board and nodded to Brannon. The flyer strapped his helmet and climbed into the cockpit.

"All O.K., sir," roared the non-com. above the subdued roar of the motor.

Brannon looked over the board briefly. Air-pressure stood at three pounds, and the pump-control was pointed toward the motor pump. The gas was coming from the main tank, which was as it should be. Temperature eighty degrees centigrade—could be a trifle higher without hurting anything. The Mercedes runs best when closest to boiling.

He closed the motor shutters and inched the throttle forward. The mechanics on the wings braced themselves as he ran the motor up to fourteen hundred revolutions a minute. He listened briefly to the singing cylinders and held the throttle open until the temperature had crept upward to eighty-seven. He throttled gradually and nodded to the crew. In a few seconds they had jerked the wheelblocks away, and he was taxying out for the take-off. His suitcase was on the left wing, wired securely close to the fuselage.

He had to wait a moment to let two ships land and get out of his way before giving his ship the gun. As he pushed the throttle forward the tiny little scout answered instantly. Within twenty feet the tail was off the ground, and it was scudding across the level grass as if shot from a gun. It took the air quickly, and for a second he had his work cut out to keep it level, for the air was already in a highly scrambled condition. The heat, plus the many clouds, was responsible for that. It darted along above the ground for fifty yards, and then, with a world of excess speed, he lifted it upward in a smooth zoom.

He circled Field One twice, as a last test for the motor. Brannon, in common with most airmen, had utter confidence in the Fokker. The thick-edged, sturdy wings, built in one section instead of a center section and hinged halves; tubular steel struts; a sturdy motor with six cylinders straight in a line and built to run perfectly on the most imperfect of fuel—all these details of construction, added to the feathery lightness and flashing speed of it, made the German plane come close to being the answer to an airman's prayer.

He kept a weather eye out for the other ships that were cluttering up the ozone like so many huge, darting dragon flies. Two stately Martins roared past him majestically, and not far away from them a tiny S. E. 5 single-seater was indulging in an aerial debauch; spinning, looping and barrel-rolling with the greatest of gusto. The bombardment group from Field Two had a big thirteen-ship formation of DeHavilands

in the air, and they were just then getting into single file preparatory to landing. A dozen instruction ships droned around both fields, landing and taking off on every round. They looked like bugs streaking along the ground.

Having made the trip to Lockville three times before, Brannon needed no map. He banked eastward, skirting the southern edge of San Antonio, and shortly picked up the railroad he must follow. It ran southwestward from the city. He settled back comfortably for the thirty-five-minute trip.

As his eyes rested on the smiling fields which swept away to the hazy horizon he remembered that he was on his last trip. The thought did not arouse any particular regret in his bosom. Flying had held him longer than any other single thing in his casual career, but the thrill of it was gone.

"Fed up" was correct, even if the Donovan Field bunch didn't believe it. He was simply ready to move on. There were too many interesting things going on in the world to miss.

BRANNON possessed one highly valuable characteristic—that of accurate self-appraisal. As is the case with any man who can estimate himself impartially, his opinion of himself was considerably lower than any one else's could possibly be. He was a drifter—a professional onlooker, watching as many of the colorful sections in the pageant of life as he could.

He had been eighteen when his father, a musical genius, had died, leaving him an income of two thousand a year. He had finished college, and then drifted into newspaper work in Boston. He was a good reporter, and during those months he came to know Sam Harding, the Sunday editor, and the only man in the world whom Brannon considered a real friend. That newspaper experience had fanned into a flame Brannon's slumbering interest in the unusual and the bizarre. He had always been an omnivorous reader, eager to absorb any new or intriguing ideas, and as a reporter he came to have an equal interest in people.

His life since then had been a perpetual deference to that interest. With the aid of his tiny income, eked out by feature stories which Sam Hardy always took for the *Beacon's* Sunday magazine, he had stayed on the trail of the unusual. Everything from a fight for the world's championship to a South American revolution found Brannon there—as an onlooker.

Ofttimes he went further than being a bystander, an interested looker-on. His short experience as a carnival employee, for instance. It had been a mere impulse, but he had followed it, got a job with a small ten-car outfit and for a month quietly enjoyed the experience of spieling the freak show. He had experimented with a hoboing tour, and ended up by doing thirty days in jail for vagrancy, in Hartford, Connecticut. He could have avoided that by paying a fine, but he went to jail deliberately, simply to see what it was like.

He went to the Balkans for four months and worked his way home. He had been broke a thousand times in odd places, but usually he could sign checks at a hotel until the first of the month came, or else dash off a story, send it to Sam Hardy special delivery and wait for Sam to wire the money for it.

At odd times, when neither of these subterfuges was practicable, he had been reduced to dish-washing in restaurants, clerking in stores, and once, for six hilarious days, he had been a bellboy. He had had a brief career in a vaudeville act, and at odd times had voluntarily worked in a coal mine, on a trans-Atlantic boat and in a powder factory.

And yet there was a streak of iron in the self-centered, lazily drifting Brannon. He had gone to France to look on in 1914, enlisted in the Foreign Legion as an experience and remained for a principle. It was foreordained that he at least try flying, which he did as soon as possible. He transferred from the French flying corps to the American Air Service, and two days before the armistice was shot down. Eight months as an invalid left him temporarily satisfied to lounge away a few more months with the game.

They had passed quickly at Donovan Field, until the morning, three weeks before, when he had awakened, stretched luxuriously, greeted the mail orderly who had tiptoed in, and scanned the brief letter from Jerry Brethton, who was in Tampico. Jerry had made some money in oil, and was bound for the San Blas country for a little trip. He thought Jim Brannon might be interested, and he was right. Furthermore, Brannon possessed a bank account aggregating more than a thousand dollars for the first

time in his existence. It was the result of months in a hospital at full pay.

That note from Tampico had been like a spark igniting the temporarily vanished flame in the flyer's bosom. In three hours his resignation was in. In two more days he would be on his way again—Tampico, then Central America, then somewhere else. Probably Turkey, if the bank-roll would-permit.

Thickening clouds ahead of him brought the pilot out of his revery. They were not only increasing, but they were getting darker. The air was extremely bumpy, too—hot sun, many plowed fields alternating with splotches of mesquite, and the clouds accounted for that. The Fokker was frequently carried a hundred feet upward in a rising current, only to drop an equal distance in cooler air above woods or ponds.

In a moment he had to dive slightly to avoid going through a tremendous mass of murky mist. As he dropped earthward he could see slanting lines of rain beneath it, so he made a half-mile circle around the shower.

There were a flock of showers round about, it seemed. For the next five minutes he dodged in and out of them, trying at the same time to keep an eye on the railroad. The ground was divided into alternate patches, a mile or two square, of perfectly dry and extremely muddy earth.

"Hope no cloud-burst has put Lockville afloat," he reflected. It would be suicide to land in a muddy field, unless there was a thick growth of grass.

There was a moment's respite when he drove along beneath a smiling blue sky and the sun played over the wires of his ship with blinding radiance. Ahead, however, a tremendous black cloud, miles long and easily fifteen thousand feet high, barred his progress.

He studied the ground a moment. He was less than ten miles from Lockville. There was the edge of the big tract of mesquite which the railroad traversed just before it got to the junction point whence a ten-mile ride on the branch line brought one to Lockville. The Mercedes ran pretty well in the rain—nothing to do but go through. If the country around Lockville was too wet he'd have to turn around and go home.

He throttled the motor and dropped into a steep dive. Finally he was in the fringe of the mist, and his goggles fogged suddenly. He turned and circled earthward in a tight spiral. He was trying to get underneath the cloud, preferring the rain to the opaque blackness of the storm-center. Occasionally he could see a jagged streak of lightning split the cloud.

He was seven hundred feet high when he decided to try it. Not low enough. In a second he was surrounded with dense mist, and could barely see the end of his wings. His little ship was being buffeted cruelly in ferocious air-currents that tossed it around like a leaf.

With motor full on he nosed over. The ship flashed downward toward the invisible earth, quivering with the speed. The rain stung his face cruelly, every drop feeling like the prick of a needle.

It took but a few seconds for the earth to loom vaguely through the gray mist and rain. He pulled up gradually, and found himself two hundred feet above thin mesquite. It was a veritable cloudburst he was in. He was soaked to the skin.

It was only a matter of minutes before that terrific rain would penetrate the motor somewhere. It was like trying to run it immersed in water. The unruffled pilot grinned slightly as he thought of that old superstition of the flyer about "last rides."

"That would be a fine how-do-you-do," he reflected. "Get smacked on a forty minute cross-country trip—and my last one at that!"

He raised his useless goggles and peered out over his arm, which was shielding his tortured face. It was rough, hilly country, covered with a thin growth of mesquite and bushes. No possible landing-place——

Suddenly a conical structure of unpainted wood loomed ahead. It was so high that Brannon instinctively pulled back on the stick. Then he saw what it was—an oil-derrick. Directly beyond it there was a grass field. Puddles of water stood all over it. He could not see it at all plainly, but he decided instantly that it would be sheer foolishness to attempt to look further. At any second the motor might quit.

He looked down at the trees coolly and saw that they were bending backward in the force of the gale. He was flying into the wind, which allowed him to land in the direction in which he was going.

It was totally impossible to look steadily ahead—goggles fogged into uselessness in an

instant, and unprotected eyes could not stand the beating of the rain. He throttled part way, and shot for the field. He made sure that his dive would carry him past the derrick and not into it. There was a line of trees between the oil-well and the field, but almost directly behind the derrick there was a wide opening which he could get through.

The ship seemed to be barely moving, so strong was the wind. With bent head he glanced sideward and saw the big derrick drop behind. He was fully fifty feet lower than the crown-block. He bent over the side for a quick look ahead. He was going directly for the opening, all right, twenty feet high. Then his hand found the throttle and he threw it wide open. The boiler of the oil-rig was set in that opening, and he was headed right for it.

Instead of bursting promptly into the rhythmic roar of a wide-open motor the Mercedes backfired and missed. Because of the water possibly, or perhaps simply because the spark-plugs were fouled with oil, it was slow in answering. There came a shock which shook the little ship from nose to tailskid. Just the undercarriage had hit the big circular boiler, but it threw the little ship high in the air, where it hovered for a moment in a stall.

In that second the motor caught. Just as the nose had started to snap downward the Mercedes went into full action. Even then the ship just swooped out of the stall inches above the water-soaked ground. Like a flash Brannon cut throttle and switches and with full rudder threw the tiny ship into a sweeping skid that sent it sideward across the ground. The skid, plus the terrific wind, seemed to stop it as a brake does an automobile. Brannon wondered briefly, as he straightened for the landing, whether he had any landing-gear left. He had hit that boiler with a soulful smack, no question about that.

The ship hovered, a foot above the ground. Brannon, arm shielding his face and every muscle relaxed, waited. The ship dropped into the mud. It slithered sideward, nose swinging to the right. He could hear a tire burst with a report loud enough to be heard above the whistle of the wind and rain, and then the tail flipped upward.

The ship did not turn over completely but the fact that he had cut the switches saved a broken propeller. Suddenly every thing seemed quiet and peaceful, even though the storm was still raging furiously.

Brannon raised his head, and one corner of his mouth twitched.

"Still all in one piece," he observed to himself. "That boiler sure gave me a kick—not to mention the ship."

He turned to look at it. Through the driving rain a great cloud of steam was billowing upward.

"Oh, ho. I'm going to be an expense to the Government right to the finish," he reflected.

Everything was dim through the slanting rain, which seemed to be diminishing in force. For the first time he noticed that his ship was slanted to one side. He climbed out carefully, and took a look. The right wheel was crumpled—the collision had done that. That accounted for the skid, and the blowout on the good wheel. Nothing else seemed damaged, except the tailskid, which had been splintered in the skid.

He unwired his suitcase and thrust it under a wing. Everything in it was soaked, undoubtedly, but if there was anything dry it would be welcome, later. This done, he perched himself on the good wheel, stooping to get under the shelter of the wing. After great effort he succeeded in lighting his pipe, no mean feat under the circumstances.

He saw two men in oilskins emerge from a shack he had not noticed heretofore, and run to the boiler. No more steam came from it. They inspected it briefly, and then returned to the shack, which evidently housed the roughnecks. The rain, while diminishing slightly, was still coming down in sheets, and the wind blew in gusts which decreased in fury as time went on.

When the storm had died away to a drizzling rain seven or eight men drifted over toward the derrick and the boiler. Evidently they had laid off work during the height of the cloudburst.

"Have to lay off a while longer, I presume," reflected Brannon. "I wonder how much this is going to cost my dear Uncle Samuel?"

The sun burst forth and turned the rain into a sun-shower.

"Might as well prepare to make ready to begin to start," the pilot remarked to himself. "Wonder how I'm going to get to town. Yonder roughnecks may not be

friendly to their uninvited guest— Hello, here comes an ambassador. He's got a business-like walk——"

The man who was slopping through the puddles toward him came at a half-run. He was a giant in stature, dressed in a white shirt, khaki riding breeches and puttees. He was totally bald and wore no hat.

"Yonder behemoth is somewhat wroth, I believe," grinned the flyer as he crawled out to meet his guest.

"WHAT the —— do you mean, ruining our boiler?" was the big man's opening remark. His full, hard face was red with exertion and fury. "You're a —— of a flyer, you are. Do you know what you did?"

"I seem to have practically ruined your supply of steam," admitted Brannon. "For which I'm sorry. However, the Government will settle any reasonable claim for damage——"

"Settle ——!" bellowed the oil man belligerently. "You know what you've done? Held us up for two days! You —— flyers, butting in where you're not wanted! What right have you got to land here? Don't you know better than to——"

The unruffled Brannon expanded into a full grin. The breathless, beefy giant was ludicrous in his rage.

"It was a slight matter of saving my neck—not such a valuable article, maybe, to any one else, but a fairly good neck at that."

"Lay off that smart stuff, mister," snarled the oil man, stepping forward a trifle.

Abruptly the situation changed, to the flyer's mind. Evidently his companion was really sore.

"I was caught in the rain, had to land at the first opportunity and didn't see your boiler until too late," he explained calmly. "Sorry, I'm sure, but really there was nothing I could do. Just one of those combinations of circumstance, you know. I hurt your boiler, and your boiler hurt my ship. So we must grin and bear it, let the Government fix 'em both up——"

"You're —— smart, aren't you? You can get a good laugh out of it, can't you? Well, let me tell you this, my hearty: Wipe that grin off your face when you're talking to me!"

Brannon's untroubled, sleepy-looking eyes met the ugly gaze of the towering oil man calmly. He remembered that he had seen the man in Lockville, two months before. He wondered why the accident had driven him into such a rage. It was unreasonable, and he, Brannon, did not like his attitude.

"Would you mind repeating that last?" he requested politely.

"I said wipe that grin off, or I'll do it for you!"

"Who appointed you as official censor, or were you elected?" inquired Brannon. "It's my face."

The big man's fingers moved convulsively. His prominent eyes, suffused with blood, measured the flyer from trim boots to bare head. For a second it seemed that he was about to spring forward. Perhaps it was the uniform that held him back. Finally he did come a step nearer. He thrust one huge, shaking hand toward the ship.

"If you weren't such a shrimp I'd take you apart," he said furiously. "But by ——, you're on my land and I won't have you there. Get that! If that ship isn't off here in just two hours——"

"What the hell will *you* do?" inquired Brannon casually.

"I'll get *you* off in pieces, and I won't except the ship!"

"That's applesauce!" rejoined Brannon without heat. "The ship is Government property, and it's out of order. It's doing no harm, and I fear that it—and I, as well, for a few hours—will continue to clutter up your pasture. Just as man to man, don't fiddle with it. There's about ten thousand government dollars right here, not including myself. While we're talking so sociably, don't get beyond your depth."

This gratuitous advice, delivered mockingly by the preternaturally calm flyer, supplied the well-known straw which was too much for the long suffering camel. The enraged recipient of it thrust out a hamlike fist with the speed of a rattlesnake. Brannon ducked, but the glancing blow laid him flat on the ground and sent him slithering under a wing. He rolled to the other side, got to his feet and put the ship between himself and his assailant, who was now in a state of bloodthirsty wrath that left him speechless.

"You're a wee bit too big for me to fight," Brannon remarked, the movement of his lips grotesque beneath the layer of mud that almost hid his face. "That is,

without aid. But I'm going to get you for that, mister, and I think I'll start now. You chase me for a minute, and then I'll chase you. There's a handy log back here, and I'm going after it. When I get it, if you're in the neighborhood anywhere, I'm going to caress that bald dome of yours with it. If there are any sprouting hairlets, I'll massage 'em for you."

Having thus given warning of his intentions, he ran back a few yards toward the stick he had seen as he got to his feet. It was a piece of a limb from a mesquite tree and was a handy weapon. Brannon had no intention of getting a beating from a man who outweighed him a hundred pounds. He knew what the oilfield rough and tumbles were, too.

His taunting words were too much for the half-insane bully to take. He charged around the ship and came bounding after the pilot. Brannon straightened, the stick in his hand, and smiled full in the face of the charging giant.

As he came close Brannon dodged neatly. In trying to turn the big man slipped in the mud and went down. Men were running toward them.

Brannon was over him before he could get up.

"Make a move, and it'll be at least ten minutes before you make another one!" he stated.

But his warning had no effect. Apparently the oil man did not lack nerve. Brannon, smiling a wintry little smile, tapped him accurately. Blood sprang from the wound, but he was not disturbed.

"Not a matter of brute strength, but accuracy," he congratulated himself, and turned to meet the three roughnecks who were now practically up to him.

They slowed to a walk as they saw the motionless figure on the ground. One of them, in overalls that appeared to have been soaked in oil and then overlaid with miscellaneous muck, took off a spotted straw sombrero and scratched his head. His tanned face split into leathery wrinkles. Brannon, who had half-expected a lot of trouble, smiled an urbane response.

"He got so sore over that boiler he insisted on fighting," he explained. "Who is he?"

"General manager of the Solar Oil Development Company," responded the roughneck.

He looked at Brannon curiously.

"You're in a mess, mister," he remarked.

The other two men seemed at a loss. Their companions had lined up farther away, watching.

"Not much of a one," Brannon returned carelessly. He squinted across the field toward a big car that was slipping and sliding along a road, toward the well. "Isn't that Matthew Downs' car?" he inquired.

One of the men nodded.

"I'll be staying at Downs'," pursued Brannon. "Take care of the exalted G. M. and give him my regards when he comes to. He's a nice, gentle chap, isn't he?"

The spokesman appeared suddenly to regain his loyalty.

"He ain't a man t' fool with," he remarked significantly.

"Can you fix the boiler? How much will it hold you up?"

"Have to put up another—got one comin' out from town fur another well. Coupla days. C'mon, boys. Let's git him over t' the shack. Better lay low, mister."

Brannon took his suitcase and trudged over to meet the fast-coming Mr. Downs, who had left the car and was picking his way across the field. He was as big a man as Brannon's victim, and looked bigger by reason of a huge white sombrero which topped off ordinary business attire.

Mr. Downs was possessed of a round and jovial countenance which was wreathed in smiles as he shook hands.

"How come Grady to be sprawled out thataway?" he asked eagerly.

Brannon told him. Downs' face became serious, and then lightened again at the conclusion of the tale.

"You can have anything Lockville's got," he told Brannon. "Take your suitcase over to the car while I snoop around a minute and see if I can find out anything from this outfit. Thank —— somebody took a fall out of that —— Grady. If nothing happens, I'm aimin' to finish the job right soon. Be back in a minute."

HE WAS as good as his word. He held brief converse with two or three of the men who surrounded the wounded boiler, and then strolled back to the car. The ground surrounding the derrick was a sea of mud, and he picked his way carefully. Brannon wondered as he watched the big Texan approach what

feud he had with the exalted General Manager of the oil company.

He knew that Downs was dabbling in oil around Lockville, although he had no idea how heavily. This was the first wildcat well to go down. Evidently it was pretty deep, too. At all events there were eight big storage tanks surrounding the derrick, from a hundred to two hundred feet away from it, and everything appeared to be in shape should an actual flow of oil materialize. If there was another boiler on the way from town, another well was evidently to be spudded in shortly.

"Get all the news?" enquired Brannon as Downs wiped his feet and got in.

"Try and get any from this outfit!" drawled Downs, but the expression on his face belied the soft unconcern of his words.

They turned around with difficulty and started bumping and sliding over deep-cut wheeltracks which seemed to be the only road.

"A man wouldn't need to sight a derrick to know there was an oil well around," grunted Downs. "I wonder if there ever was one brought in on a good road, or a field that wasn't out in the wilderness?"

The road turned to the left, and for a short distance ran around the rim of the field where Brannon had landed. He saw Grady on his feet, walking toward the derrick.

"What's your grudge against yonder big bug?" asked Brannon. "I seemed to detect a certain unregenerate joy on your part at the news that he'd been smitten on the bean. Didn't you say something about finishing the job off?"

"I did. Furthermore, —— willing, so shall it be!"

Brannon grinned at the huge Southerner whose prowess as a scrapper was well known to him. It was mostly in the past, for Matt was a family man now, but the legend persisted in Lockville and various oil fields.

"Just general principles?" he went on. "Don't like his style?"

"Everything," stated Downs, guiding the crawling car expertly over the miniature mountain ranges of the road. "The geologists made a —— good report on this section for oil, as I presume you know. You see, what they call the 'great fault' runs from Laredo, or maybe even Tampico, right through up to Mexia, and another big fault connects at Mexia from Smackover and that country. Every big field, practically, like Ranger and Mexia and Burkburnett have been the result of this great fault and smaller cross faults. Faults are really natural formations running through the earth making reservoirs for the oil. It seems that right here we're right close up to the big fault, and that there are two cross-faults that should dam in this territory right here and hold a pool of oil in it.

"Well, as you know, I've been dabbling in oil as a driller for the last five years or so. As soon as I got the geological dope on this I decided to gamble on my home town. I went out and leased acreage, bought half-royalty, even a sixteenth royalty, on other tracts, went halves on leases, and in general got my hand in strong. The Solar came along right away. It's a new development company with plenty of capital, and they decided to sink on this territory. The geological report was strong. It's a wildcat proposition, but with a lot of capital. The President is a millionaire a couple of times over.

"Well, the Solar got about all the land, some of it outright, that I hadn't got hold of. Me and my partners, that is. Taking everything into consideration, I felt justified in going strong, so all I could beg, borrow or steal went into acreage. I figured on getting out even by selling some of the stuff at a profit when the Solar commenced to drill. You can always turn a small profit at the start on close-in acreage.

"You just saw their first well. Well, they couldn't have picked a better spot for me. I've got fifty acres offsetting that well, and my other stuff was near enough. This Grady, the manager and a big stockholder came to town right at the start and has been acting as though he owned it ever since. Of course, Lockville is all excited at the prospect of a field, and the G. M. of the Solar can get away with anything. He's a big, tough bully, dictatorial as ——. Well, you got a sample.

"First thing the Solar wanted was my acreage, or part of it. I wouldn't sell right then. Decided to gamble a little further, and the dozen or so fellows who are partners with me on various pieces of acreage agreed.

"Grady and I have had it hot and heavy over this acreage of mine several times. Just two days ago I got news of what the crooked rat had put over on me, and it

just about puts your Uncle Matt on the shelf, —— 'im!"

They were close to the main pike, and in a moment the car had turned off on a fairly good dirt road.

Downs relapsed into silence, as if brooding over the situation. Finally Brannon ventured to ask:

"Just what did our friend do?"

"Plenty!" stated Downs viciously. "Every bit of acreage and royalty I had, except that fifty acre offset, was bought from darkies. They owned practically all the tract which should be in the center of the pool, if there is one. The Solar people bought their land of darkies, likewise. My stuff was bought at a fair price at the time—some of it a big price, because this was a year ago. I had information that the geological report was good. A little later, when a stranger appeared here and began leasing acreage, I'd been in the oil business long enough to know that somebody was going to drill a wildcat well. So I jumped in on the ground floor, and at the end was practically even with the Solar in land. Of course, I didn't know what company this stranger represented, then. Well, when the Solar and Grady finally lit in here, and had no luck buying my stuff from me, this Grady mooched around and has succeeded in getting seventeen different colored men to swear that I extorted their land and part royalty shares from them through threats. I am supposed to have told 'em that I represented a lot of Lockville men who'd kill 'em all off if they didn't sell us their stuff.

"It's all bunk, of course. The deals were open and above board. It's a fifty-fifty shot I can beat the case eventually, but it ties up all that stuff tight as a drum until it's out of litigation. And with the Solar behind it that litigation won't be over for two years, if I can afford to fight 'em that long, which I can't. I can't fight 'em at all, right now. It leaves me high and dry—my land tied up, can't make a deal, and broke."

"Except that fifty," said Brannon.

"Even there they've got me. I'm in deep, Jim. I've borrowed some money, have notes to meet and haven't five hundred cash in the world. Here's the situation on that fifty: The Solar, on account of Grady, is riding for a big fall. He doesn't know the oil game, but that doesn't help me out. Here's what he's doing: Instead of letting the big company scouts in on things and giving 'em every facility for getting a line on prospects, Grady is secretive as ——. Nobody knows what the showings on the well are. The big companies have got their well-scouts and land men here, and Grady is treating 'em like dogs. The —— fool doesn't know that if he gets a well, or ten of 'em, that he won't know what to do with the oil that flows. He figures maybe on building a pipe-line, getting loading-racks, getting cars to ship the oil in, and that stuff. Where's he going to refine it? Where's he going to sell it if the big men want to freeze him? A wildcat company makes money just one way—bringing in a field and then selling out to the big bugs at a fair price, which they're always willing to give. The big companies are within a jump or two of pulling out altogether, regardless, if Grady keeps on the way he's going.

"Here's the way it affects me: I'm broke. I've got fifty acres in the center of what geologists are sure ought to be a field. If that well out there has had good showings—if the formation has run true and all that—I'd be justified, broke or not, in hanging on. The lease cost me a thousand dollars. I've got an offer from a stranger named Nillon of two thousand. If a five-hundred-barrel well comes in, my stuff is worth fifty thousand. Nillon represents Grady, I'm sure. I told Grady if he talked to me again about anything I'd kick the tar out of him. We're just that friendly. If the well comes in merely a gasser, I'm stuck cold. Being broke, I shouldn't take a chance.

"Another thing. I wouldn't put it past Grady to plug up that hole for a while just to freeze me out further. I'm only a little fish, you see, but by getting in a year ago I'm the big land competitor of the Solar."

"There's no way you can get an idea of the showings, eh?"

"Not a one. Why, the big company men don't know a bit more than I do. Nobody knows anything. They guard the —— thing at night, while the night crew is on. They're down nineteen hundred feet, and according to all the dope should be about to the pay sand, if any. It did leak out that they were going to take a core today. You stopped that until Monday, anyway. It'd be worth two thousand to me to get a tiny sample of that core, and maybe it'd

be worth fifty thousand! I'd give a year of my life to land a chunk of it from under Grady's nose!"

Brannon, ever interested in anything new, had been listening with absorbed attention. They were riding along slowly through the outskirts of town as he asked—

"Just what is the core?"

"It's a sample of the pay dirt. You see when they get to this pay dirt, or what should be the pay dirt if there is any, they don't know how thick the layer is. The deeper they go the more surface there is to draw from—the more oil seeps into the hole and the bigger the well flows. If they get a trifle too deep, into salt water, say, everything is ruined. So when they get down to where the geological dope says the pay should be, they send a hollow iron pipe with an automatic clamp on the end of it down there and get a sample.

They send this to a chemist for analysis. They can tell about how much oil there is in it, and in addition whether it's a sand or lime formation. Lime usually peters out quickly—sand is what everybody wants. More oil, and longer flow. Sometimes they feel their way down, taking cores several times. At others they take no chances, and bring in the well as soon as the core shows pay. They'll bring that first core out about Monday morning—as near as I could tell they've got the drill stem halfway down now.

"Those were scouts I was talking to out there, and they said they were sure they were going down for a core. The roughnecks wouldn't say a word, although they know that all we've got to do is stand around until they come out, and we can see whether they took a core or not. They won't even let any one stand around on the Solar land, watching, half the time. I'm —— sure they won't when they bring out the core, but my acreage is only a hundred and fifty feet from the well, so that's the grandstand. Grady's gone hogwild. He thinks he's the biggest oil man in the country right now, I guess. He used to be a foreman working Springs on some plantation in Mexico. He shows it. He won't get by—but before he gets taken I'm afraid I'll go down. Have to be satisfied with a couple of thousand—and I've invested over ten thousand."

They were now on the main street of Lockville. All the buildings were on one side of the street, facing a discouraged park consisting of sand and gnarled mesquite trees. Beyond this abortive attempt at civic beauty was the railroad, paralleled for several hundred yards by cattle-pens. An arcade covered the sidewalk for its entire length—a necessary protection for shoppers in Texas.

IT BEING Saturday, Lockville was a live village. Hundreds of Mexicans and negroes, arriving by every known method of locomotion from burros to Fords, swarmed over the sidewalks, and the curb was lined with a motley array of rickety wagons, saddle horses, and cars. Brannon could see symptoms of unusual animation which far transcended the Saturday crowd, however. There were dozens of expensive cars which did not belong in Lockville, and many men who were plainly strangers standing around the street. Lease-hounds, big company representatives, roughnecks and other followers of the elusive boom were on the ground as the time drew near for the first well in a highly regarded location to come in. Of course it was in no sense a boom town, but it was ready to turn into one within twenty-four hours if that crownblock out there should be sprayed with oil.

Brannon, who had been silent as they made their way down the street, finally asked suddenly:

"Just what do they do after they bring the core out? With the core itself, I mean. Wrap it up and ship it to their chemist, or can they tell pretty accurately how prospects are by just looking it over?"

"An experienced man can get a good idea as to whether or not oil is there, and oftentimes what the formation is. Of course, the chemical analysis gives the richness, exact formation in accurate percentage, and all that stuff. I'd give my left arm for just a look at it and a smell of it. There's Ada on the porch, waving at you."

Brannon returned the greeting as they drew up in front of a big white house with a wide, vine-clad porch.

"I am not entirely satisfied that I have suitably returned Grady's advances," he remarked as they got out. "For my own satisfaction and the good of his soul, I must mingle with him again."

Downs grinned at the placid airman.

"You've done plenty. It's my turn."

TWO young—exceedingly young—ladies burst forth from the house as Brannon was shaking hands with Downs' comely wife. She looked smaller than she really was in comparison to her huge spouse. Doramay, six years old, greeted Brannon rapturously. Alice, aged two, was as chunky as her elder sister was slender, and was undoubtedly the busiest human being that far South. In the space of five minutes she had brought forth all her dolls, got Brannon to swing her, had run across the quiet side street to make calls on two families and slid down the back of the davenport until an accident happened to her dress, which caused Mrs. Downs to temporarily retire her to inner regions.

Brannon, too much of a philosopher ever to be actively discontented, was nevertheless unusually content when spending a weekend with the Downs. He had met the gigantic Southerner a year before, as the result of a forced landing near Lockville. An invitation to spend the night as a guest at the house had worked into a warm friendship between the two men.

Brannon found a few items of clothing which did not have to be wrung dry, donned them and then called up the field. He arranged to have a new wheel and tailskid shipped down on the afternoon train from San Antonio. There was just time before lunch to start the phonograph and dance with Doramay. This rite was invariably performed within an hour after his arrival at the Downs' domicile.

Dinner was a bit more quiet than was usual when the two men got together. The invariable badinage which generally passed between the quizzical flyer and the softly drawling, humorously inclined Texan was conspicuous by its absence. His host was quiet and distraught, and Mrs. Downs' face reflected her anxiety.

"Want to run up town?" asked Downs after the meal. "I've got to see a few men —see whether there's anything new. Better come along and let 'em look you over. That little fracas this morning'll be the topic of the day."

Brannon went and found that Matt's statement was no exaggeration. It was all over town, and had "aroused glee in large gobs," as Jim remarked to Downs. It was easy to see that Grady was as unpopular as smallpox, but that, as the leading spirit of the company which might bring a fortune to every tradesman and almost every resident of Lockville, could do no wrong great enough to warrant retaliation from the townspeople. Nevertheless, that knock on the head was a sweet morsel for the men who had secretly yearned to perform the operation themselves, and Brannon was greeted with respectful, contained admiration and gratitude.

It was likewise apparent that the slow-talking, quiet men of Lockville were laboring under a heavy load of repressed excitement. Brannon, who had taken a week's leave one time to look in on the Mexia boom when it was at its height, could readily understand why Lockville was taut and strained to the breaking point. Long-drawn-out anticipation was within a few hours, comparatively, of possible realization. And if there was a gusher out there on the Weathers tract, it meant that to own a store was to be in line for a small fortune; that every extra room in a house was worth a hundred and fifty dollars a month or more; that a part of the gold which flowed from the ground would find its way into the pockets of every citizen.

He and Downs met the afternoon train and secured the parts for the ship. Brannon decided to wait until the morrow to do the repairing, because of the muddy roads. The hot sun which had beat down continuously since the cloudburst had done wonders with the mud, but it would be an easier trip next morning. That evening he went with Downs to the one hotel in Lockville and for three hours sat back quietly and listened while tanned old-timers—well-scouts, oil-scouts, land men, purchasing agents—swapped yarns about the famous booms of history.

The Mexia hoosegow at its height; bitter races over almost impassable roads for acreage in the Ranger pool; sleeping on the sidewalks of Eastland; how Judge Strong spent six million dollars for his company in two hours at Witchita Falls; the youngster in Tampico who had been robbed by hijacker, searched him out, turned hijacker himself for the moment and lit out of Tampico three thousand dollars richer within fifteen minutes after he had been robbed—these and a thousand other glimpses of the game were vouchsafed him as moonshine flowed freely and the taciturn oil men lapsed into geniality and loquaciousness.

It was after twelve when they slipped

through the quiet street toward home. The moon hung low in the purple canopy that was the sky, and a tiny Gulf breeze stirred the mesquite trees to dry whispering. Brannon, who had been silent and absorbed all evening, asked suddenly:

"If you had a piece of that core, Matt, what chemist would you send it too?"

"Huh?" grunted the surprized Downs.

"Well, that doesn't matter, anyway," remarked Brannon thoughtfully.

"What doesn't matter? What the —— are you trying to enunciate, if anything?"

"Just trying to remember or think of some spot where I'd like to have you sitting sometime Monday."

Downs swept the car into the little lane behind the house which led to the garage.

"Funny, but those drinks didn't affect me thataway," he seflected sadly.

"Oh, I'm in my right mind," Brannon said airly. "I refuse to divulge anything going on in my truly remarkable brain, though. I will not give you guilty knowledge. If after I sleep on my scheme it still looks like a good way to smash two eggs into one frying-pan, I'll elucidate further. I fear that maybe those wild and blood-thirsty yarns told so matter-of-factly this evening may have somewhat upset my usual tranquil temperament, and urged me to deeds of too stupendous valor. However——"

"That's a lot of language you're using up," commentd Downs.

He pushed the door closed, and they started up the walk toward the house.

"Let's fire a parting salute to the evening in the form of cigaret smoke," suggested Brannon, and accordingly they veered around the house and took seats on the veranda.

The quiet street was shaded by towering trees in full leaf, and widely spaced white houses nestled behind luxuriant shrubbery. There was something appealing in the quiet peace of it all to the wandering flyer, and yet even as he fell under the spell of it he did not make the mistake which so many of his breed do under similar conditions. While at the moment there seemed to be nothing in all the world so satisfactory as settling down in some such placid surroundings, he knew that it was not for him. The time would come, and come shortly, when there were too many interesting things in the world to let go by without taking a look. Temporary emotional appeal never swept Brannon off his feet.

Downs blew a few reflective smoke-rings and then mentioned Brannon's prospective departure for the first time.

"We're sorry you're leaving, Jim," he drawled.

It was characteristic of him that he asked no questions, although he had not the slightest idea what Brannon was planning to do in the future.

"I'll be drifting back occasionally," returned Brannon. "I'm going to slip down to Mexico—I've only popped in there once before—and possibly take a couple of months further south with a friend of mine."

"You lead a tough life, don't you?" enquired Downs oratorically. "Slipping here and there at your own sweet will must be hard to take."

The Texan's words were a half-invitation to self-revelation, and for a moment Brannon was impelled to break his invariable custom and talk about himself. The habit of years was too strong, however, even though the idea of confiding in some one was strangely appealing at the moment. So his answer, lightly given, was as noncommittal as always.

"I always enjoy something a bit out of the ordinary, or that I haven't seen before" he said, and then added "It was a treat to listen to that gang tonight."

"The oil game is a great game, begging its pardon for calling it a game. It's a great combination of fight, gamble and business."

Downs relapsed into silence, which Bannon did not break. He stole a glance at the great bulk beside him and surprized on his friend's face an expression of bitter hopelessness. It was as if his reference to the oil business had brought home to him, with increased force, his present situation. Brannon could appreciate what was running through Downs' mind, because he knew of the long fight the Texan had had to establish himself.

After a few years as a salaried man, with no prospects for advancement, he had turned into a business soldier of fortune. Cotton-seed broker, speculator in cattle, driller in the oilfields—that episode alone was an epic. Starting with one rig bought with mostly borrowed money, Downs and his partner had grown to a firm with five

rigs and a reputation for bringing in any well that had a drop of oil within a mile of it. His trusted partner had succeeded in getting most of the profits by clever trickery, but even so Matt had come out fifteen thousand dollars to the good.

Now, it seemed, Downs was in a fair way to emerge from his present situation with only two thousand dollars to show for fifteen years of nerve-wracking labor.

Brannon's mind turned to the idea with which he had been toying for several hours. It was a characteristic Brannon conception, born of his freakish sense of humor, his habit of yielding to any impulse, no matter how bizarre—and that streak of iron in him which has been mentioned. Real friendship was rare in his life, and the Downs family had quietly crept into his heart.

Retaliation for the episode with Grady that morning played no part in his decision, except as more or less of a joke. The raging Grady and the fracas in the mud appealed strongly to his sense of humor, as did the plan he had in mind for Monday. Everything, including life in general and himself in particular, was a comedy to the flyer. The touch of deadly seriousness lent by Downs' predicament simply made the humor of the scheme take on an additional and peculiarly exquisite flavor.

"You've got a gun you could lend me, haven't you?" he asked as they went in. "I want one when I interview Grady about the damages to his boiler."

"Uh-huh."

Downs paused at the door and seemed about to ask a question. Brannon's query, taken in connection with his vague hints earlier in the evening, were almost enough to make the harassed Texan give tongue to his curiosity. Finally, however, Downs merely whispered a good night and held his peace.

ON MONDAY, along toward the middle of the morning, Brannon was pretending to tinker with his ship, although he had made all repairs the day before. Downs was the only other person near the ship, for it was on the Solar Company's land and the considerable crowd of men who were at the well preferred to stay on Downs acreage rather than have trouble with the high-handed Grady.

Brannon had been half-expectant of trouble with the bull-headed general manager himself, but the big Irishman was either too busy on the floor of the derrick to bother with him, or else had decided that he had better not fool with the representative of the government any further. He and Brannon had not met again during the week-end, although Brannon, in pursuance of the scheme he had in mind, had sent a note to Grady informing him that certain papers regarding the damage done to the boiler would be submitted to him for his signature within a few days.

The flyer had also called up Slim Evans, back at Donovan Field, and held long converse with him. Slim had promised to attend to several matters which would make it possible for Brannon to spend the shortest possible time at Donovan Field before leaving for good.

Word had gone out the day before that the new boiler would be installed by four or five o'clock Monday morning, so Downs and the flyer had arrived at seven.

They were coming out, now. They had the core. The motor was chugging away, and bit by bit the nineteen hundred feet of drill-stem was being drawn out of the hole. As each fourble came clear the crew disconnected the section and the great traveling block, swung from the top of the derrick, carried the length of piping over to one side, where it was piled vertically with its mates.

"I guess I'd better crank up and taxi over," remarked Brannon. "I hope she starts without any trouble."

"It'll be a half-hour or more before they come out with the core, if that's what you've been waiting for," Downs told him.

The big, placid Southerner was hard put to it to repress his excitement. Of definite information regarding Brannon's plans he had none. All he knew was that in a moment he was to start for a spot on the road to San Antonio, five miles from Lockville, which Brannon had designated yesterday. The smiling Brannon had absolutely refused to divulge any details whatsoever.

"Why lay yourself open to the temptation to commit perjury—a heinous crime," he had said. "There might be trouble, you know."

Despite all he had at stake, Downs had tried his best to deter Brannon from his scheme, even though he had no definite idea as to what it was. This having been unsuccessful, Downs was now tingling with

the thrill of it. Brannon had asked innumerable questions as to probable procedure when the core came out, and as he moved around the plane preparing to crank up he seemed utterly cool and sure of himself.

They procured two big stones for wheel-blocks, and Brannon turned on the gas-feed from the gravity tank, primed the motor and then had Downs swing the prop a few times to suck additional gas into the cylinders.

"All right—get away!" he yelled, and clicked on the starting magneto and spun the starting lever.

It took three trys, but finally the Mercedes hummed into life. The twenty or thirty men—mostly scouts—who were hanging around on the dim chance of finding out anything, watched interestedly as Brannon pulled the blocks, got in the cockpit again, and taxied directly toward the fringe of trees between the field and the derrick. The roughnecks, temporarily at ease, gathered at the edge of the floor, and even Grady deigned to throw a glance toward the feathery little ship.

With Downs pulling and hauling on a wing to help him around, Brannon turned the Fokker until it was pointed up the field. Then he cut the switches and climbed out.

"You'd better take off yourself, Matt," he said as he thrust out his hand. "Don't forget to drop me a line as soon as anything definite happens—you've got the address."

Downs, chewing a straw meditatively, shook his head and smiled. His eyes were soft as he crushed the flyer's slim hand in his own great paw.

"I don't know what you're doing, exactly—you always were a mysterious cuss——"

"I'm trying to get even with yon behemoth," smiled Brannon. "By 'something definite' I mean what you eventually get for your unencumbered acreage. So long—see you again in a few months when I come north."

After Downs had driven away Brannon unscrewed a couple of spark-plugs and pretended to clean them. He had put them in again and was trying to decide whether to take a chance on another one when he saw the drill-stem come clear of the hole. On the end was a short length of hollow iron pipe, its lower end plugged by iron clamps. Inside that short length of pipe was the core.

He watched out of the corner of his eye. Two men who had been pointed out to him as officials of the Solar Company were making for the derrick floor. The iron shell holding the core was unscrewed from the end of the drill-stem, and Grady himself, accompanied by the two men and the chief driller, carried it over to the toolshed a few feet from the derrick.

Brannon blocked the wheels and swung the prop. The motor caught on the first swing of the starter and idled sweetly. He removed the blocks and pulled the gun he had in his waist-band a bit further out. He took from his pocket some sheets half-covered with typewriting and lounged toward the toolshed, taking a slightly circuitous route in order to avoid being conspicuous.

The roughnecks had distributed themselves, with apparent carelessness, between the toolshed and the restless, tense group of men standing a hundred and fifty feet away, on Downs' property.

Brannon was within twenty feet of the rear of the shack when one of the roughnecks saw him. He was a powerful young fellow, stripped to undershirt and overalls.

"Have to get back, lieutenant!" he shouted.

Brannon increased his pace, coming around the shack.

"Just a minute, please," he said in a low voice, to prevent being overheard. "I'm leaving right now, and I've got to get this claim for damages filled in before leaving, if Grady wants his boiler paid for."

"Yuh can't see him right now—I'll yell for him, but——"

"I can't wait."

Two other roughnecks were drifting toward him, so Brannon whirled and walked swiftly to the shack, careless of the yells behind him. It was only ten feet to the door, and he pushed it open unceremoniously. His gun was in his hand.

The four men were bending over a crude shelf on the other side of the shack, which was barely fifteen feet square. Their backs were toward him, and they turned in startled amazement as the door swung open and closed again behind Brannon. On the shelf was a heap of moist earth—the core.

"Don't be startled, gentleman," said Brannon suavely.

He could hear shuffling outside that door—evidently the roughnecks were at a loss. The flyer's ordinarily sleepy-looking

eyes were widened a trifle, and there was a gleam of pure enjoyment in them.

Grady, his face suffused with red, was staring at the menacing gun as if hypnotized. The driller, a bearded, dirty specimen of dyed-in-the-wool oilman, had his hands in the air. The two officials were white and shaking.

"This is rather dramatic, but entirely harmless," Brannon went on. "I'm not seeking your money or anything else. I merely want this claim for damages filled in so that the Solar Company will get what is due from the government. I'm using this gun, Grady, because of your unprovoked assault the other day. I have no desire to stop one of your fists again. I think a plea of self-defense would get me out of any trouble arising from shooting you or any one else who interferes with me. In any event, I'll shoot quick and think afterward if you lay a finger on me. Will you three gentlemen, all but Grady, move over to the wall, please, and stand there while Mr. Grady, the larruping looloo who is so quick to use his fists when he's sure he has the advantage, fills in his estimate of the damages and scans this report of mine to see that it's correct? Thank you."

The three men, patently relieved, leaned against the side wall. Brannon moved to the shelf, his gun ready, and laid the reports down close to the core.

"You've been reading too many *Diamond Dick* stories," sneered Grady. "You got no business in here——"

"Well, I'm here. Let's get this over, Grady. I have no desire to stay any longer than necessary around you."

Grady's fingers moved significantly. For a moment he seemed to be weighing his chances, but Brannon cut in warningly.

"If you don't think I'll shoot and shoot quick, make a move in this direction, Grady! And no more of your lip, either. Are you going to look over that damage report? Fill in the amount right here—" his finger indicated the place—"and the description of damage here. Here's a pen."

The other three men were looking on, and there was more than a hint of enjoyment in the bearded driller's puckered eyes. Probably Grady was far from popular with his underlings, reflected the flyer.

Grady hesitated and then snatched at the papers. Brannon edged a trifle nearer the core. Up to this time it seemed that no suspicion of his real purpose had entered the minds of the oilmen. Holding the gun in his left hand, he suddenly picked up a handful of earth in his right, as though from a careless impulse.

"Drop that!" yelped Grady furiously, and actually took a step forward.

The other men were suddenly tense.

Brannon shoved the gun out significantly.

"Why all the excitement?" he said surprizedly. "You haven't got a diamond mine, have you?"

He dropped the handful of dirt carelessly, and the tension slackened. Grady read the report of damage by snatches, watching Brannon uneasily. Finally he filled in the amount of damage, and a short description of the exact damages required of him. There was utter silence in the crude, littered, muddy building. Brannon could hear the roughnecks talking, but apparently they were several feet from the door.

"There you are," snipped Grady, shoving the papers toward Brannon. "Now you and your —— —— airship get the —— out of here, and stay out!"

Brannon smiled, folded the paper with one hand, and stuck it in his shirt. Grady was facing him, five feet away. Both of them were leaning against the plank shelf. The other three men were against the wall Brannon was facing.

The airman's right hand fell carelessly to the shelf.

"The more I listen to you, Grady, the less I like you. Every time you give vent to something, it makes me sicker. Consequently, I take great pleasure in doing anything—anything at all, which does not meet with your approval. I don't know why you got so excited over my running my fingers through your dirt here, but just because you don't like it——"

Like a flash he scooped up a handful of the core, and before a man had moved or spoken was out the door. He darted around the shack, and in a second was running like a deer for his idling ship.

Grady was roaring like a bull as he charged out the door. Brannon, a blissful grin on his face, heard excursions and alarms back of him. He stole a glance—the same young roughneck who had first accosted him was twenty-five yards back of him, followed by a procession which included Grady.

Brannon shoved the moist earth into his

shirt pocket as he ran, and vaulted into the cockpit. Without waiting to strap his belt, he thrust the throttle forward and then back again. That was to clean out the motor, but the Fokker answered even that little stab of power by getting into motion. The leading pursuer was five yards away when Brannon opened the Mercedes wide. The Fokker was off winging. It took the air half-way across the rolling field, and in half a minute Brannon was circling back The enemy was grouped in the field, while the spectators had remained motionless. Every head on the ground was tilted back to watch the ship.

BRANNON, chuckling boyishly, nosed over with motor full on. He dived like a rocket for that disconcerted group on the ground. He was barely five feet above the field, headed on a course that would carry him within a few feet of Grady and his henchmen, before he leveled out. As he shot past them his fingers wriggled a farewell to Grady.

He zoomed upward an even four hundred feet and sped toward his rendezvous with Downs. With his right hand he got most of the core out of his pocket and dropped it into a small canvas bag, weighted with stones, which was hanging on the compass. He drew the drawstring tight and succeeded in tying a knot that would hold. To free his hands for this task he flew for a few seconds with the stick clamped between his knees.

At the turn in the road which was his goal he saw Downs' car. The Texan was standing at the edge of the pasture which paralleled the highway. Down swooped the Fokker until the wheels were almost scraping the ground. Then it banked to the right and zoomed upward at the same time in a beautiful chandelle. The canvas bag and the gun hurtled to the ground, fifty feet from where Downs was standing, and the Fokker straightened out for Donovan Field, running wide open.

Brannon gave vent to several chuckles as his mind ranged back over the week-end. He had put an ace or two into Downs' hand, at any rate. He wondered just what action Grady would take, if any. His own procedure was definitely decided if there was any trouble waiting for him at Donovan Field, although it was unlikely that they could catch him there. His story would be that he had no idea that the little heap of earth there in the shack meant anything, and that he had taken a handful of it simply to annoy Grady. The gun was easily explained and excused because of Grady's unwarranted attack on Saturday. There could be no proof that he had dropped the sample to Downs.

If Grady did make any trouble, which was very doubtful, it would probably catch up with him at Laredo, on his way to Tampico. His trunks would be at the depot—Evans had promised to see to that. All he had to do was land, receive his final papers, which were ready, and catch the twelve o'clock train South. He could make that easily. Unless Slim had slipped up everything should go off like clockwork.

It did. There was not a hitch in the smooth-running machinery of the field. At 11:50 he entered the Pullman. His baggage was checked, and his discharge and ample funds in the pockets of his well-tailored civilian clothes. Nor was there any trouble next day on the border. He crossed to Nueva Laredo without any delay save the regular customs routine.

A week later he received a bulky letter postmarked "Lockville" and addressed in Downs' handwriting. There was a newspaper clipping, which Brannon perused first.

"Solar No. 1 Comes in at Lockville. Flush Production 900 Barrels a Day.

was the headline over a picture of the gusher spouting fifteen feet over the crownblock.

The story below the picture really added little to the tale, except in details. The well was flowing in two-hour heads, making about eighty barrels to a head, and the opinion of experts was that the settled production would be five hundred barrels a day or thereabouts. There were statements from Grady and other Solar officials.

He opened Matt Downs' brief note.

DEAR JIM:—

I held on, and sold yesterday for $40,000 to Jesse Hamlin, the Southern representative. You met him—the fellow that called himself a creek-specialist. The mysterious Nillon raised to five thousand Monday night, and I'd have sure sold out—had to, in the shape I was in—if it hadn't been for you. Anything I own is at your service any time.

Ada sends regards, and Doramay says to tell you to come back soon. We all echo that.

As always—MATT.

EARLIEST CALIFORNIA HISTORY

by **Faunce Rochester**

COULD wild-cat speculators and bunk artists in general familiarize themselves with a snappy little volume published in Spain in 1510 under the name of "The Sergas of Esplandian, the Son of Amadis, of Gaul," they would always refer to that era whenever regretfully lamenting the "good old days." Think of turning a vendor of punk oil-stock loose on a people who swallowed the following and eagerly asked for more:

"Know that on the right hand of the Indies (for quaintness these nine words are hard to beat) there is an island called California, very near to the Terrestial Paradise, which was peopled by black women, without any men among them, because they were accustomed to live after the manner of the Amazons. They were of strong and hardened bodies, of ardent courage, and of great force. The island was the strongest in the world, from its steep rocks and great cliffs. Their arms were all of gold, and so were the caparisons of the wild beasts they rode."

Some pickings among the admirers of that work for the modern young man with a neatly engraved certificate to sell! But the writer gets stronger as he proceeds, and among other things says:

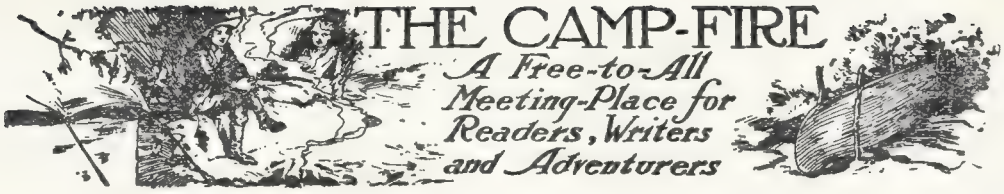
"In the island called California (perhaps the name is first found in this little romance) are many griffins, on account of the great savageness of the country and the immense quantity of wild game to be found there."

It has ever been man's whim to dream of new lands where there are "Cities of Gold" and "Terrestial Paradises." Romancers told and wrote tales of the fabulous long before the New World was discovered. The incredulous was accepted as a fact if it lay over the horizon. Red men living in tropical luxury and eighteen-carat surroundings was told of the aborigines where now stands the city of Bangor, Maine. The Spanish believed in the Fountain of Youth, and the French capitalized mountains of gold in the Mississippi valley under that genial promoter, John Law.

But to return to our griffins, which, by the way, were half eagle, half lion—rather a stout combination. The griffins weren't all bad. All intended to be "bad" according to man's point of view, yet unwittingly they must have saved many lives, as the following excerpt from the writer's description of sea perils will convince:

"The crew and passengers consume their provisions and then die miserably. Many vessels have been lost in this way; but the people have learned to save themselves from this fate by the following contrivance: they take bullocks' hides along with them, and whenever this storm arises they sew themselves up in the hides, taking care to have a knife in their hand; and, being secure against sea-water, they throw themselves into the ocean. Here they are soon perceived by a large eagle (really half-lion) called a griffin, which takes them for cattle, darts down and seizes them in his gripe, and carries them upon dry land, where he deposits his burden upon a hill or in a dale, there to consume his prey. The man, however, now makes use of his knife to kill the bird, and creeps forth from the hide. Many people have been saved by this stratagem."

Sir John Maundeville described California giants having one eye (old stuff). He improves when he speaks of others "of cursed stature," and having eyes "in their shoulders." Another tribe, says Honest John, has "horses' feet." Another is "all skinned and feathered." One of his best bits is his frank confession, "Of Paradise I can not speak properly, for I was not there."



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOMETHING more about that bank robbery in Panama, touched upon at a previous Camp-Fire:

San Francisco.

I notice an inquiry about the bank robbery in Panama City a decade or more ago and will add this for what it is worth.

An old-timer on the Canal, who knew personally all four of the men implicated, told me substantially the story as it appears in the January 30, 1922, issue with the following variations:

THE robbers were supposed to be going on a hunting expedition and were helped unknowingly to load their boat by a couple of Panama policemen. That when they landed in Colombia, they bought their freedom from detection for $600 silver from a police official. I have forgotten the name of the town on the Pacific side where they landed.

In settling the share of loot each was to get there was a fight in which two were killed, the other two splitting the money 50-50.

According to the old timer's story, one of the remaining robbers came back to the States and the O. T. claims to have met him and stopped at a hotel. He, the robber ran in Chicago. "Quien sabe?" The other lost his share gambling and stayed in Colombia.

Now to carry on a bit further. In 1916-17-18 I was in the C. Z. and from there went to Chile. While in Chile I happened one day to be talking to one of our boys who had spent a number of years in Colombia and the talk drifted to the big ditch and finally to the robbery. This fellow told me that he had worked in a gold claim on the upper Magdalena and that the robber who lost all had been at work in the same camp; that every one from the *Jefe* down knew it and knew who the man was; that none bothered him and that he made no bones about talking about it if he had had a few drinks; that when sober the fellow was very quiet with very little to say.

I am sure the straight of all that happened could be obtained from Captain Cartano of the Panama police. The last time I heard of him, he was in charge of policing the San Blas country.

AS FOR myself, this is my first trip to Camp-Fire. I have lived long enough in the tropics to use the sign manual of all old timers who have seen both sides of the equator—TTT. I am not entitled to this—TTTT, or to this—TTTTT. Any old timer and lots who are not can tell what the first is, the second never was, and the third are legion and can be met with anywhere south of or north of 22° and a few in the States though it is not against the 18th "commandment." I have seen a few in Mexico, Panama, Peru, Chile and a few other places and, although settled now here in the S. F., no doubt shall be again hitting the long trail some day.

I do not use any name because I do not know if Old Timer would care for some one else to break him into print. As for *mi otro amigo*, the sheriff is not yet dead.

Hasta luego, amigos mios.—B. C. D.

ONE of you, who I think forgot to enclose his name, sent us this clipping from the San Francisco *Chronicle* in response to a question asked in that paper:

I can not tell Joe I. Sedgley what became of "Black Bart," but after he retired from active operations as a stage robber he was on Wells Fargo & Company's payroll for a number of years and called for his check regularly every month. I saw him once after the fire. I think it was in 1908, and a few years later he stopped calling, and they have never heard from or of him from that day to this.—OLD TRAMP.

AS STATED before, on Eugene Cunningham's suggestion we have done what we should have done long ago—asked our cover and heading artists to join with our writers in the Camp-Fire custom of introducing themselves to all of us. Most of them have for a long time sat silent around the blaze, but it is only natural for all of us to want to know more about the men whose work helps make our magazine.

We in the office not only like our artists as good fellows but feel, with warrant, that they take a friendly and real interest in the magazine itself, not only doing good work for their own sake but doing their best to make it fit the magazine and make it benefit the magazine. They've helped us in many a tight pinch when something had to be done in a terrible hurry, have been ready to give any suggestions of ours a fair hearing, and have done their best to have the material of their pictures true to fact. Yes, they slip up sometimes, just as editors, writers and readers slip up sometimes, but no man is perfect and when he does his best and his best is a good best no more can be asked.

WE'VE put this up to our artists and as their replies come in they'll reach you at Camp-Fire. As new artists join us, the same invitation will go to them. To begin with, here comes the man who painted the cover for this issue.—P. N. Merrill:

New York.

Your letter asking if I might care to arise from the circle and do my stuff for the comrades upon the occasion of my first cover for *Adventure* comes as a most agreeable surprize. I'm mighty glad of the opportunity. Still, I have so little to tell, particularly from an adventurous standpoint, that the honor promises to prove embarrassing.

The facts are: Born thirty years ago in Ithaca, N. Y. Reported and cartooned a little for an up-State paper during high school. Came to New York and worked on railroad construction for a while—then in an office and then the war came along. Did fifteen months in the army, all on this side, and after the armistice got married. Discharged from the service and decided to follow a natural bent and take up illustrating. Still at it.

That about sums it up and there's darn little adventure in it. Being unlucky as to that sort of thing, I have to read about the other fellow's fun and then try to paint it. A great curiosity as to how certain characters actually looked has led me to do considerable research in history and ethnology which has resulted in a taste for both subjects amounting almost to a bad habit.

I might say in conclusion that I'd rather sail or hunt than eat, but that the necessity of eating keeps me too busy to indulge much in either.—MERRILL.

ONE day Mr. Merrill was talking to Mr. Cox about a certain bronze ax and Mr. Cox asked him to pass the data on to Camp-Fire. Here it is:

Here is the yarn about the bronze ax of which I told you some time ago.

THAT the Norsemen made pre-Columbian voyages to America is generally conceded to be history rather than legend. Eric, the red and turbulent, who colonized Greenland; Lief, his son, who was the actual discoverer of Vinland; Thorfinn Karlsefni, who attempted the colonization of some portion of the New England coast, together with others of lesser importance, seem to be well authenticated characters. Their stories are given in detail in existing Icelandic manuscripts. How long they were here and in what numbers is not so clear. It appears highly probable that some sort of commerce in furs and massur wood existed between Iceland and Vinland from the discovery in 1000 A.D. to at least 1121, and possibly until 1347. There is a reference to the arrival of a ship from Markland in one of the old records at this latter date.

In spite of all this, actual evidence in this country of their occupation is extremely scanty—a couple of stone towers of questionable origin, an alleged ampitheater, and some rock inscriptions which are probably Indian pictographs although they have been seized upon by the over-enthusiatic as European. Consequently when the story which follows came my way it seemed sufficiently interesting to pass along to Camp-Fire and here it is.

SOME years ago when Mr. Harrington of the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation) was in the Grand River country, Ontario Province, he was offered by some Indians a collection of implements purporting to have been picked up on the site of a prehistoric village. They were the usual chipped flints with one exception. That exception was a bronze ax-head which Mr. Harrington at once recognized as a palstaff of European manufacture. The Indian owner somewhat indignantly denied that it was anything other than an Indian ax hammered from native copper, but that if the gentleman wanted it for fifty cents it was his. Subsequently the weapon came to New York, where it found a resting place on Mr. Harrington's desk.

Shortly after this a Norwegian archeologist visited Mr. H. at the museum and saw the palstaff. He immediately identified it as of Norse manufacture and dating from the eighth century. His opinion was that it was one of the most interesting objects he had ever encountered.

The simplest explanation is, of course, that the Indians obtained the palstaff either by theft or in warfare. The Norse made it a point not to barter weapons with the Skraellings and this policy very possibly makes clear the rarity of such relics as the one in question.

WHILE on the subject and somewhat in line with the Japanese stone lanterns found among the Indians on the Pacific coast and discussed in Camp-Fire, Mr. Harrington tells me that a coral rock *poi*-pounder of undoubted Hawaiian origin has been found among the California Indians. It is now at the Museum and, while it bears asphaltum decorations put on by its later owners, its point of manufacture seems to be unquestionable. I'll leave it to the brothers of Camp-Fire to figure out how it got to the coast.

I think personally that its mighty interesting and possibly it may lead to the unearthing of additional data on this subject of pre-Columbian voyages. Its a subject that makes good reading.—MERRILL.

It happened that Hugh Pendexter spent the past week-end with me and among other things talked of various indications of European visitors to this continent long before Columbus came along and got all the credit. He made the point that the Vikings did not indulge in stone towers and works of that kind. Also the point that Indian legend carries persistently the idea of men in scales (armor). Also—but I shouldn't be telling his story. Instead, I'm going to stop right here and write him to see whether he won't pass this dope on to Camp-Fire direct. Didn't ask him at the time because I had a hunch he was saving that material for some particular purpose, but maybe my hunch had no foundation. What I particularly hope he'll talk about is Pemaquid, Maine. If he comes across his talk will follow right along here; if he's saving it for special use, we'll have to wait until this material comes to us in some other way.

FOR some dozen years we've talked at Camp-Fire about good citizenship. Long ago and several times we tried, and failed, to start an organization to work toward this end. Now we are again considering such an organization. But, in addition to having gained from past experience, there is now this difference—times have changed. What then seemed to many a needless and wholly idealistic idea has now, through the development of actual events, become to most thinking people an acute need of the most practical nature. Our earlier attempts were ahead of their times, that is all. Now the times seem to have caught up with them.

All over the country organizations are springing up, brought into being by the unrest of the present and the threatening aspect of the future. While we contemplate an organization of our own, it is a duty to consider any and all organizations that seem to be working sincerely toward the general end. Also by studying them we should be the better able to shape our own organization if none of the others proves wholly satisfactory. We can also, as individuals, support any of these other movements that appeal to us, for our real object is not just to further an organization of our own but to further the general end in view by whatever lawful methods seem best.

Some time ago we examined the program of the Central Committee for the Enforcement of Public Opinion. Let's this time examine the National Federation of Uncle Sam's Voters, Citizens Bank Building, Washington, D. C.

Here is the Federation's case as presented by itself:

A national non-profit federation with local assemblies—organized regardless of political or sectarian affiliations—to create and sustain a lively and an intelligent interest in all local, state, national and international questions; to provide an opportunity for the discussion of these questions; and to persuade all citizens to participate more actively in American government.

"Let us Converse together and open our minds freely to each other. Let every town Assemble. Let Associations and Combinations be everywhere set up to Consult and recover our just Rights."

—Samuel Adams, Oct. 5, 1772.

These inspired words best typify the meaning and the purpose of Uncle Sam's Voters. It is a non-profit, educational federation, organized regardless of political considerations—to awaken and sustain a lively and an intelligent interest in all local, state, national and international questions.

It is our object to develop an enlightened electorate and to encourage direct participation in governmental affairs by every American citizen, without distinction of age or sex. Moreover, the organization will endeavor to enlighten and encourage young men and women appraching voting age, and aliens eligible for citizenship.

The basis of the Federation is recognition that "knowledge is power." Knowing that enlightened voters will vote intelligently and that unenlightened voters will be misguided, Uncle Sam's Voters endeavoring to bring before its members and the people of the country at large, the thoughts of leading minds of all political faiths, concerning important questions of the day.

IN ORDER to stimulate popular knowledge of governmental affairs, Uncle Sam's Voters will revive the old-time town meeting as an effective force in modern life. Local Assemblies—patterned after the New England town meeting—are being organized everywhere, enabling the citizens of the community to foregather and discuss their political, social and economic problems.

Uncle Sam's Voters provides the opportunity for discussion—it does not attempt to limit these discussions nor to shape them, except that subjects are suggested for use at each week's meeting.

UNCLE SAM'S VOTERS will be a self-supporting organization. Nominal dues, sufficient only to meet the necessary expenses of the organization, will be collected from members. It has no obligations or allegiance to any person or interests. Its work will be carried on vigorously by the membership fees of the individual members.

Ira Nelson Morris, recent U. S. Minister to Sweden, is president of Uncle Sam's Voters. Former Congressman James W. Good of Iowa, and Mary Lee Adams are vice-presidents. G. B. Wayland of Virginia is secretary.

Samuel Adams of Chicago, widely known editor and formerly president of the American Agricultural Editors Association, is director general. An advisory board of representative citizens participate in the direction of the organization's activities.

LET it be remembered that Uncle Sam's Voters is not bound to any political party nor to any "movement" or "cause." It has no ax to grind—no propaganda to preach. Its sole purpose is to provide citizens everywhere with the means for meeting and discussing the most important questions of the day.

It does not seek to impose an opinion, but so to quicken interest and broaden knowledge that a firm foundation will be laid for that sound judgment which enables each one to form a reasoned individual opinion. We believe that when an opinion is formed after careful discussion and consideration, action will be taken in the form of exercising the rights of citizenship by voting.

UNCLE SAM'S VOTERS publishes an inspiring monthly magazine called *Public Affairs*, which is devoted to a pro and con discussion of the leading political, social and economic questions of the day.

Each issue contains in detail a number of interesting subjects for discussion at the weekly meetings of the various Local Assemblies of the organization.

Public Affairs is mailed to every member of Uncle Sam's Voters; the membership dues paying all costs of editing and publishing.

UNCLE SAM'S VOTERS is now forming Local Assemblies. Its founders expect they will provide the means and inspiration for awakening throughout America a newer and livelier interest in Government; that they will develop into live Forums—wherein men and women of all political beliefs will foregather, in the same fashion and in the same spirit that directed the settlers of New England toward the town meetings, there to discuss questions and problems affecting their government and their lives.

You who are in harmony with the public-spirited endeavor of this great organization, should apply for membership at once. You will not be asked to subscribe to any political doctrine or belief. We have no views to express—no creed to preach; we merely seek to provide a means in every city and hamlet in America whereby you and your neighbors can express, each to the other, your own opinions, beliefs, purposes and desires.

Probably you will be interested in organizing a Local Assembly in your own neighborhood. We will be glad to write and tell you about the few simple steps that are necessary to take in forming a Local Assembly of Uncle Sam's Voters.

The following is from their leaflet "How to Organize a Local Assembly:"

The charters granted by the National Federation to Local Assemblies authorizes them to meet for the discussion of the political, social and economic questions of the day, but no candidates are to be endorsed for any office or position by an Assembly of Uncle Sam's Voters, and no resolutions are to be passed advocating or opposing a course of action on any question by an Assembly of Uncle Sam's Voters. The charter of a Local Assembly will be cancelled for violation of these cardinal principles. The place for endorsing candidates and passing resolutions is at meetings of your political party. The Local Assembly of Uncle Sam's Voters is the place to clarify your views by discussion.

LET it be clearly understood that Assemblies of Uncle Sam's Voters do not infringe on the activities of other organizations, but will promote the welfare of all and supplement their work by the full and open discssion of political, economic and social questions on a strictly non-partisan basis.

These facts will enable you to work closely with and to get the cooperation of churches and religious organizations of all denominations, farmers' clubs, labor unions, women's clubs, schools, chambers of commerce, community clubs, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., Y. M. H. A., Knights of Columbus, etc. These groups will welcome the opportunity to form an Assembly and use our weekly subjects for discussion as part of their program. This will add life and interest to the meetings of many groups.

THE members will find the services of the Information and Research Bureau one of the very valuable features. This service is free to members, who are urged to make liberal use of the bureau when seeking information on political, social and economic questions of the day. It is conducted on a purely non-partisan basis. Both sides of questions, with references, are furnished members seeking information.

Further details may be had from the Federation. The above gives the main points.

Personally I consider its aims excellent so far as they go. Its limitation—perhaps not an unwise one—is that it is educative only and educative only in knowledge of public questions. Its education in the exact

nature and obligations of good citizenship is, at best, indirect and secondary. It provides no way of expressing and enforcing public opinion except through the very doubtful machinery of the political parties, thereby making said machinery all the more powerful—an end many of us do not desire. Its central idea would make a good first step if closely linked up with the central idea of the Committee for Enforcing Public Opinion as the second step. Ten or even five years ago it would have met the situation. Has the situation developed to such acuteness that this movement can no longer meet it adequately and in time?

The above is merely my own personal reaction. It is up to every good American to consider this organization, form his own opinion and act accordingly.

At a future Camp-Fire we'll consider another organization along these general lines, probably the Legion of American Watchmen.

REMEMBER we once queried a point in one of Raymond S. Spears' stories—of pearls that stopped a bullet from a man's chest without his noticing any pain or even impact, though the pearls were smashed? Mr. Spears has since sent me several pieces of data upholding his contention and is now good enough sport to send something against his contention. In other words, what Mr. Spears wants is the real facts on all material used in his stories, not just to justify himself when a bit of his material is questioned.

The other day I sent you a note about a spectacle-case that stopped a bullet from going into a city marshall at Scribner, Nebraska. I wrote him, and enclose the answers to my questions, also enclosed. Note that the blow "was painful right away"—so my belief that such a blow might not at first be noticed in the excitement of a fight is thus far denied. I shouldn't have thought of a bullet-blow feeling like being stuck with a needle. Thought you would be interested in the correspondence.—SPEARS.

THIS is Mr. Spears' letter to the marshall in question:

Dear Marshall Ropken: Your friend W. M. Lamb, of Omaha, sends me a clipping telling how a spectacle-case stopped a bullet pointed into your chest. I just had a story printed in *Adventure*—July 30 issue ("The Shellers")—in which I tell how a bullet stopped against a piece of copper tubing containing a valuable pearl. Now would you mind answering these questions?

1. What did that feel like when it landed against you?
2 How big a bruise did it make?
3 How long before it was painful?
4 Did you feel the blow at the moment?
5 What caliber was the bullet—lead or jacket?

A writer wants to be sure he's right about such things, and you'll help me much if you'd let me know these things.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS.

MARSHALL ROPKEN'S letter follows:

Scribner, Nebraska.

In regard to your letter I will answer your questions: Question No. 1. It felt just like one sticking you with a needle. No. 2. As big as a dollar. No. 3. Painful right away. No. 4. Yes. No. 5. Thirty-eight lead bullet from a Colt Special revolver.—HENRY ROPKEN.

NOT being sure of the signature of the following letter, I've given it as best I could. The name, however, suggests a German—there are plenty in the Argentine—and Germans are not noted for their preference for cold steel.

Instead of laughing at him for his mistake in taking Mr. Bechdolt's article for fiction, blaming him for a hasty jumping at conclusions or meeting his hostility with similar racial hostility, I'm inclined to sympathize with him, not in the particular case but on the general treatment of Latin-Americans in North American fiction—a feeling that Mr. Bechdolt has elsewhere expressed himself as sharing.

True, the North American fares as ill at the hands of the Latin-American, in and out of fiction, and this, too, is to be regretted, but we have earned much of our unpopularity south of our Mexican border. Perhaps more than they have earned unpopularity with us. For one thing, our commercial representatives down there have in large part been extremely unfortunate selections. North Americans resident there or really familiar with conditions will ardently back up this statement. These representatives operate on the idea that they are dealing with people their inferiors in every way, which is not true, and are not sufficiently kindly, tactful and efficient to disguise this feeling. What can you expect when our average man in business has only just begun to realize the practical business-getting value of personal consideration in business dealings here at home? The German, the Englishman and almost any other foreigner in Latin America knows better. And they—to give the

only test that appeals to so many of our business men—"bring home the bacon" at the expense of general American business in Latin America, for our innocent suffer with our guilty.

SECOND, you can not blame the Latin-American for considering our country a menace. The average American has no faintest desire to interfere in South American affairs, and even Mexico is subject to covetous eyes only from the small minority of individuals who have or hope for business profit there. As to Border difficulties, probably Mexicans have fully earned local hostility, but Mexico is rather a case apart and certainly is not to be classed with such countries as the Argentine, Brazil, Chile. No, Latin-America has nothing to fear from the American people themselves. The Monroe Doctrine, in fact, leaves us ready to fight in defense of their integrity. But our Government, as operating in the West Indies and Central America is another matter, and personally I do not blame them for suspicion of what our politicians and the capitalists so largely controlling our international relations may do to them. We ourselves suffer sufficiently from said politicians and their controllers to have suspicions on our own account. But Latin-Americans can not be expected to realize that the great bulk of the American people wish them well, not ill; naturally they judge us by such specimens and manifestations as they have seen.

WE DO not like their bad points and they do not like ours, and neither seems much inclined to note the other's good points. Perhaps some day we shall come to appreciate each other's better side, making allowances for differences in standards. It will help if we of the North bear in mind that in much of South America there is no middle class, only the highest and the lowest. And if they, in turn, will realize that the average American is comparatively unknown to them, since he goes along minding his own affairs, and that he's fundamentally a kindly and friendly critter.

Anyhow, here's hoping, for if the world continues its plunge toward chaos the two continents may need each other very badly.

So, if our comrade in the Argentine is irritated and expresses his irritation, let's blame it on the general misunderstanding between the North and the South and, like Mr. Bechdolt, meet him without answering irritation

BUT, says some one, why, then, does *Adventure*—like practically all American magazines—allow Latin-Americans to serve so often as villains in fiction? But, after all, does it? In its writer's brigade you find a number of such stanch defenders of Latin-Americans as Edgar Young and Gordon Young, and surely T. S. Stribling, in "Fombombo," forced us to a less prejudiced point of view. For the rest, it is only the old story of objection from any race when one of their nationals happens to figure as villain in fiction. In any country's fiction it is natural that foreigners of some kind should often play that rôle, but if *Adventure* in such matters shows any bias against any particular race it is an unconscious one. And in our fiction I think you'll find a very goodly proportion of American villains. Maybe some day we in the office can get time enough to tabulate our villains, major and minor, as to race, religion, etc. Or maybe some of you will take a try at it, covering ten issues or so in order to make the test worth while—your choices for each story, differentiating between foreign villains in their own countries and foreign villains imported into our own or other lands for the purpose, and balancing up with a counteracting list of heroes. Some job, but it would get the facts.

To return to our Argentinian, as Mr. Bechdolt said in a latter to me, "I can understand how men of those races often smart, particularly as some of them are as brave as any one else."

Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Of course you cater for an American public, and fiction is fiction. The cowboy is necessarily a supergunman and hero, and the "dago" as necessarily a cowardly and treacherous being, presumedly because he has a hankering for the knife as opposed to the "gun," for murder and such-like, and not having grasped the fact that a knife is *not* quite the equal of the "gun" in a fight at ten or twenty feet distance, allows himself to be neatly and safely "potted" (or is it "bumped?") by the superman.

But even fiction has limits and "Camp-Fire" would seem to be a sort of court of appeal.

MR. BECHDOLT in his "Cassidy's Wild Bunch" finds the Argentine a fit theater for some of his hero's colossal deeds. Sheltered behind the "high stone walls" of a cattle corral, to which there is access only by a narrow chute, he holds off over a

hundred (why boggle at trifles, dear sir? Why not the round thousand?) of swarthy soldiers, killing them in a leisurely and gentlemanly fashion?

IT IS conceivable, however, that even "swarthy" soldiers might have the gumption to understand that a single man in roofless enclosure *can* be approached from several sides, and that to climb the "high stone walls" one after another all at the same point and get "bumped" is poor tactics, though perhaps, demonstrating an accommodating spirit.

In regard to the high stone walls possibly Mr. Bechdolt has met cattle of the kangaroo or flying fish variety, that leap over walls that are not high, but our Argentine cattle are more sedate and a corral of wire and posts or pickets, or if posts are abundant and cheaper, altogether of posts, through which it would be simple to "pot" the gunman, is the rule. Any attacking force not composed of congenital idiots would immediately grasp the fact. The chutes are employed for marking or branding and necessarily must be lower than the height of the calf to be branded; the idea of a man making a fortress of a cattle chute is worthy of high praise as an absurdity.

THERE certainly did occur a cowboy episode, perhaps fifteen or twenty years ago, in which the leading spirit was a Boer from South Africa.

They did some thieving in the lonely places of Patagonia, where the Boer was finally caught, and the rest of the lot, as I recollect, were last heard of in connection with the holding up of a branch bank in the province of San Luis, and in their flight had some distant skirmishing with a patrol of the local police. What their end was I do not remember, but it is my impression that they got away to Chile; in any case there was nothing dramatic or melodramatic in their disappearance. They certainly never had any collision with our "swarthy soldiers," whether in hundreds or units.

IN CONNECTION with "swarthy" I see in your May 20, number that only a little over 55 per cent. of your population is of white American parentage; that leaves, say, twelve per cent. of parentage of the "swarthy" races of Europe. In the States you have twelve or more per cent. of fullblooded negroes as citizens; in the Argentine I doubt that there is one-half per cent., even including mulattos.

NOW as to the knife versus the "gun."

It may be within your recollection that in the "thirty's" of the past century there arose in your midst a man—a real man—a Kentuckian colonel, who devised as a gentlemanly implement a knife, called after him, "the bowie." He evidently appreciated the fact that, if you are a real man and have "guts," the knife will put you to the test. There, eye to eye, foot to foot, your left arm enshrouded in your "poncho" for parrying, as our gauchos fight, there is no being "quick on the trigger or draw," or getting the "drop" on the other fellow, but a real test of courage.

Consider the difference between getting in the first shot and dropping your man in an instant, and a fight for say a quarter of an hour during which time the "specter" is never absent from your shoulder, and your knife is drinking blood and the other fellow's knife also is drinking yours.

In your country came along Derringer with his cowardly pocket pistol, and later Colt, with his revolver, and the "bowie" fell out of the scheme. But not elsewhere. Any poltroon with a gun or two may hold up and make crawl half a dozen braver men, but if your gunman was reduced to knife-play I wonder how many of him would retain title to heroism.

Does Camp-Fire print this?—E. HAMM.

MR. BECHDOLT'S reply:

Carmel, California.

In re "Cassidy and the Wild Bunch," to which your correspondent takes exceptions on the ground of its being sadly overdrawn fiction:

The tale in the first place is a fact story, and written from sources whose authority is beyond question.

AS TO the incident in the Argentine where Cassidy dies:

The authority for this comes from two sources. One is a former operative of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, who is now in business for himself, running an agency under his own name. The other is now a well-known citizen of Wyoming, who knew Cassidy well and was sent to the Argentine by certain parties to identify the body. This man, himself an ex-cowboy, tells the story as I have put it. He got it at the scene of the death. I can not give his name for good reasons. I can however give the name of Will Simpson, now a well-known lawyer of Cody, Wyoming, who was prosecuting attorney at one time, as a sponsor for the man who furnished this data. Mr. Simpson will tell you that he is thoroughly reliable. I know personally also of this reliability. Mr. E. L. Crabbe of Shoshoni, Wyoming, will also vouch for the reliability of this gentleman, whose name is withheld at his own wish.

These two authorities, the Pinkerton man and the Wyoming man, were neither of them aware of the other's existence; and the statements of both dovetailed.

The records of the Argentine undoubtedly contain verification for Cassidy's death. The matter was given some publicity in newspapers; but few details were in the items.

AS TO the alleged imputation of cowardice and the insinuation of bias on my part against the "swarthy soldiers," permit me to say that I could have gone stronger in my account and adhered to the truth. For the facts are that when the soldiers finally did come into the corral after Cassidy's death, they entered through the cattle chute—and they pushed a woman in ahead of them! I did not use that because it did not sound nice.

As to the standing off of odds by Cassidy: If your correspondent had taken pains to read the story carefully, he would have noticed that this outlaw once escaped from Castle Gate, Utah, when the street was full of armed miners and when he had a two-gun guard and a man with a rifle to stand off besides the crowd. Any one who has seen the old Irish type of miner of twenty-odd years ago will be willing to accept Cassidy's standing off big odds of Argentine soldiers, after knowing that he got away from that Castle Gate bunch when they were waiting for their money on pay-day morning.

NOW concerning the nature of that stone corral. I take my account as given me. Such stone corrals do exist in Spanish American countries even to this day occasionally. It is altogether possible that your correspondent, living in Buenos Aires, and being familiar with the Hereford and shorthorn cattle of the nearer pampas, may not have known the nature of every little village on the edge of the Andes where longhorns still run.

I think what ails your correspondent is the fact that the hero of this tale is a gunman. He evidently likes the knife better than the six-shooter. Such things are matters of taste. He is entitled to his own preferences; but it seems to me he should not be narrow about it. Brave men have wielded knives all right; but some brave men like guns. The firearm goes better with the Anglo Saxon than the dagger.—FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT.

PROBABLY no one will let one of 'em bite him just to prove they aren't fatal, but words of warning on the subject are not amiss:

Phœnix, Arizona.

I have not noticed any arguments in our magazine lately about the killing-power of tarantulas, scorpions and centipedes but have had in mind writing you for some time and have you ask these birds who are arguing about their bite being fatal or not, one little question which they have passed over and which as a matter of fact is all important and that is, *Fatal to what?*

THE bite of these varmints probably wouldn't fease a grown up man. If he had absorbed any amount of this moonshine we have to drink nowadays it would probably kill the spider. Nevertheless, a two-year-old child was killed by a centipede at Buckeye, Arizona, the other day and was attended by a physician, and the case is one of medical record and can be substantiated if you wish.

My better half read that fellow's argument that these bugs were not fatal and gave me the —— for cautioning her so strongly about watching the baby, and if such an article made her careless in this respect I feel that it might be the unwitting cause of more fatalities.

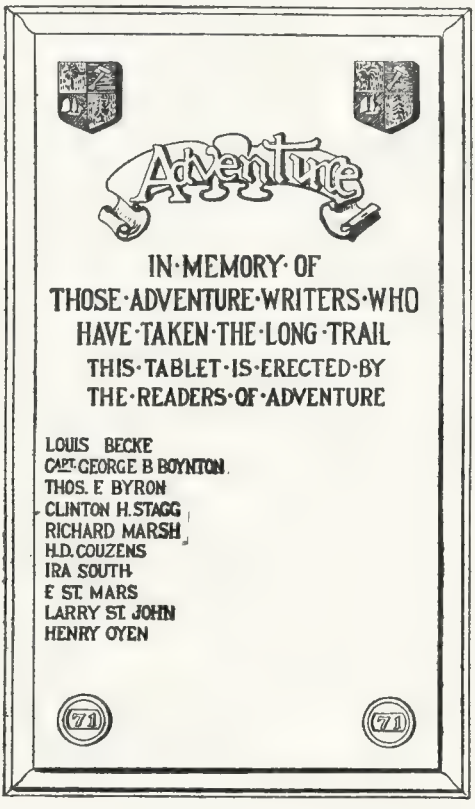
You can tell the cockeyed world that if a tarantula such as the one mentioned in the enclosed clipping bites a *small* or *young* human being it will kill 'em deader than ——.—A. B. A.

THE newspaper clipping referred to above follows. All I can say is "Gosh!",

DOUGLAS, Ariz., July 17.—W. J. Murphy recently drove over one of the largest tarantulas ever seen in this section of the country. The tarantula's legs measured four inches in length.

The tarantula, according to Mr. Murphy, was as large as a young chicken, and when the car struck it a distinct shock could be felt through the body of the machine.

THOSE of you who come into the office from now on will find on the wall of the general reception room the memorial tablet to the writers for our magazine who are no longer with us, erected by you the readers. It seems to us here in the office very satisfactory in every respect and we trust those of you who see it will agree with us. For those who can not see the tablet itself we give the following picture:



The body of the tablet is of wood. The general effect is simple and dignified, Camp-Fire's colors showing but in no way too prominent. The tablet was designed and executed by the J. & R. Lamb Art Works of New York City.

It must seem a long time since you were asked for the small contributions that together have put up this tablet. It seemed to us at first a quick and simple matter, but things are not always so quick as they seem. We hope that it will have your full approval now that it is at last in permanent place. Besides the obvious office it performs this tablet stands for a comradeship among readers, writers and editors that is, I think, without a parallel and of which we are justly very proud. May that

good comradeship continue after all of us now here are gone.

HERE is a look in on old days in the West, by one of our comrades who grew up among men widely known. I hope that he will by all means give us the "more" he speaks of:

Bellingham, Washington.

Am always seeing something concerning some of the old-time bad men of what is now Oklahoma. Every time any thing appears it makes me want to "kick in" and add my mite to the sum total of what is written.

In 1889, my father, Col. Jacob Yoes, was appointed Marshal of the Western District of Arkansas, and continued as such until relieved by Col. George J. Crump, who was appointed by President Cleveland to succeed him, Crump's appointment being made May 29, 1893.

At that time the Western District included all of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Seminole Indian Nations, which today form the Eastern part of Oklahoma. It also contained nineteen counties of Western Arkansas. This created quite an extensive territory and required several score of men to enforce the laws of the United States.

The headquarters of the district was located at Fort Smith, Arkansas, near the junction of the Arkansas and Poteau Rivers. It was there that the famous Judge Isaac C. Parker held sway over the greatest criminal court in the world. It was in this court that all men who violated the laws of the United States were tried and the records of the court stand unrivaled in the annals of crime.

As a youngster I used to sit about the office and listen to the exciting stories related by various deputies when making their reports to the chief marshal. Frequently they told of their battles with the desperadoes in various parts of the jurisdiction, adding from time to time little personal sketches and citing acts of unselfish devotion upon the part of different officers. As the months passed my imagination was fired by the continual contact with such men as Heck Thomas, J. H. Mershong, Columbus Ayers, Bass Reeve, and others who rode the range and gave their undivided attention to exterminating the outlaws of the beautiful Indian country lying to the west. There was a terrible fascination in the whole thing, and my one wish was to become one of them, little realizing the continuous danger to which such a life subjected one.

After overcoming the fears of my mother, and bringing great persuasion to bear on the chief marshal he gave me a commission, dated December 29, 1889. In my estimation my fortune was made then and there. But——

I soon discovered that it was a man's sized job and I was but a very small cog in a resistless machine.

As a mere boy I had read many books of Western travel, including Gregg's "Commerce of the Prairies," and Irving's classic on the West, and there had sprung up in me a love for the outdoors. My imagination leaped out across the hills and sought the far places, places of adventure. I could almost imagine myself one of the old-time "Long Knives." My one desire was to mount a good horse and follow in the wake of the "chuck" wagon until we came to the uttermost edge of our territory, and that desire has lingered with me for thirty years, or until a few years since when I settled down here in the Pacific Northwest.

Among the older men that I knew, and learned to love, were Heck Thomas, J. H. Mershong, Dave Rusk, Jim Lee, Paden Tolbert, John Salmon, Charlie Barnhill, John Swain, Barney Connelly, Charlie Bowden, Enoch Mills, Dan Chapman, Mich Ellis, Charlie Copeland, Heck Bruner, Capt. G. S. White and Bass Reeve.

Also, there were Bob and Grattan Dalton, Henry Starr, Jim French, Milo Creekmore, Jim and Bill Cook and others who became more or less notorious as bad men and killers.

Of those enumerated above several met violent deaths. Bob and Grattan Dalton were killed while robbing a bank in Coffeyville, Kan.; Henry Starr while robbing a bank in Arkansas; Jim French by officers while resisting arrest; Creekmore and the Cook brothers were incarcerated in various penal institutions. Barney Connelly was killed by Shephard Busby who was hanged at Fort Smith for the crime; John Swain was killed in a shooting scrape in the Chickasaw Nation; Heck Bruner drowned in Grand River; while John Salmon lost his life in Paris, Texas.

Having once made the venture, I lived a life of adventure such as seldom comes to one, and for four years rode the range. Constantly on the go, there was a never-ceasing change and during that time many exciting days were lived and actually enjoyed.

Having read the article on Cherokee Bill, by Mr. E. A. Brininstool, my mind was called back to the days long gone and memories were awakened which have caused me to dig down deep into the store house of the past. The inclosure is the result. It may not prove suitable, but nevertheless this is based on absolute facts.

Since beginning it I have wondered why none of the writer brigade have tackled a resume of some of the old-time officers who made it possible for people to live in security in the Indian country in times passed.

Should this prove of interest I might be able to give you more dope relative to some of the life stories I have read in your publication.— JACK W. YOES.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs that Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: 1st Sept., 1st and Mid-Dec., 1917; 1st and Mid-March, 1st and Mid-Apl., 1918; 1st June, 1919; 1st and Mid-May, 1920.—Address W. S. CHAPMAN, 24 Union Ave., Portland, Oregon.

WILL BUY: November, 1912. Must be in good condition.—Address F. ANDERSON, 663 Lexington Ave., New York City.

WILL SELL: All issues 1921 and 1922; first twenty-five issues, 1923. In good condition, covers intact. Ten cents each.—Address ALFRED C. BOWMAN, 91 Englewood Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

WILL SELL: All 1917 except 1st Sept., 1st and Mid-Dec.; all of 1918, except 1st and Mid-Apl., 1st and Mid-March; all of 1919, except 1st June; all of 1920, except 1st and Mid-May; all of 1921, 1922 and 1923. Fifteen cents each, postpaid.—Address W. S. CHAPMAN, 24 Union Ave., Portland, Oregon.

WILL SELL: All issues, 1920 to 1923, five cents per copy; all issues, 1911 to 1920, ten cents per copy.—Address RICHARD ZORN, North Baltimore, Ohio.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails in next issue*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey and Asia Minor
27—29. Balkans. In Three Parts
30. Scandinavia
31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
32. Great Britian
33—35. South America. In Three Parts
36. Central America
37, 38. Mexico. In Two Parts
39—45. Canada. In Seven Parts
46. Alaska
47. Baffinland and Greenland
48—53. Western U. S. In Six Parts
54—57. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
58—63. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Army Matters, United States and Foreign
American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
Standing Information

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

On board the *Gauntlet.*

I am English, born at Oxford in 1874. At sea in deep-water square-rigger at fourteen; followed the sea twenty-two years, commanding square-rigger

and several steamers. Collected what qualifications I possess as an "Ask Adventure" man by travel or residence in the parts I cover for the department, and by my experience as a sailor. A few years ago went to Bermuda to live with my family. At present am cruising where the winds may blow me in my sixteen-ton schooner *Gauntlet*. Write fiction for a living, and sometimes sell a story or two. Have been an "Ask Adventure" man almost since the department was started, and have had a lot of fun in the work. Try to give my best to all inquirers, and hope they find something helpful in my replies.

Have lived a fairly eventful life, but probably shall never know all that has come near happening to me. Just as an instance, three weeks ago I received a letter from an *Adventure* reader telling me that during the war he was gun-pointer on the forecastle of a patrol vessel which sighted the small sloop I was sailing to Bermuda, and that his gun was covering me, loaded for submarines, with an itching finger at the business end until the skipper got my signal wagged with a pair of bathing-trunks on a boat-hook, asking for water. One never knows what's going to pop. Lucky that pointer didn't have St. Vitus' dance.

Hope this will suit, old-timer.—A. E. DINGLE.

Olympia, Wash.

Educated at the United States Naval Academy. Served for some years as deck officer of sailing-vessels. Held a limited master's license on inland waters. Writer for many years about maritime matters. Never taught school or preached from a pulpit. Have tackled 'most everything else.—BERIAH BROWN.

Washington, D. C.

I started flying in San Diego back in 1915 in a Curtiss flying boat. Came East, and in the Winter and Spring of 1916, along with Gordon MacCreagh and a few others, built the headquarters of the New Jersey Naval Reserve Aviation Section, Keyport, N. J., on the spot where the Aeromarine factory now stands.

Went to the Curtiss Aviation School at Newport News, Va., in June, 1916, and under the supervision of Capt. Thomas Scott Baldwin—"Cap" cashed in his last checks as a major in the United States Air Service in May, 1923—obtained my pilot's license in September, 1916.

Enlisted as a private, United States Army, at Fortress Monroe, November, 1916, and finished up my flying training at Newport News in March, 1917. Was commissioned a first "looie" and put on active service with the Third Aero Squadron at Fort Sam Houston, April 2, 1917, four days before we declared war on the Huns. Transferred to the First Aero Squadron, Columbus, N. M., in May and went overseas with this outfit, landing in France September 3, 1917. Went through most of the French flying schools that Fall and Winter and was stationed with the First Squadron at Amanty, just a few kilometers back of Toul.

Made the first flight of any American observation pilot, in a fully equipped observation plane, across the Hun lines on April 2, 1918. Didn't intend to go across, but got lost and —— well shot up by archies and anti-aircraft machine guns before we got home again.

Commanded the Ninetieth Aero Squadron at the front from June to October, with the exception of a few weeks in the hospital, and then was given command of the Third Corps Observation Group, First Army Air Service, consisting of the Eighty-eighth; Ninetieth American Observation Squadrons, the One Hundred Ninety-ninth American Supply Squadron and the Two Hundred Fourth; Two Hundred Fifth and Two Hundred Eighty-fourth French Observation Squadrons.

Promoted to captaincy in October when put in command of the group and wound up the war at the time of the Armistice on a little, miserable airdrome at Bethlainville, a few kilometers west of Verdun. If any of the old Third Group crowd see this, here's "Happy Landings" to you all and a wish for some of the good times we used to have together in the mess hall after the day's work was finished.

Along with "Mort" Adams, my observer, brought down one "official" Hun, and received a Croix de Guerre and gold star and three A.E.F. citations.

After the armistice was sent to the First Army Headquarters and after being Operations Officer and Assistant Chief of Staff, wound up as Chief of Staff, First Army Air Service, with Winter quarters at Bar-sur-Aube. Promoted to a majority, April, 1919.

Returned to the United States in July, 1919, and was sent to Kelly Field, where I remained for a year and a half as Operations Officer, First Wing, Mexican Border Patrol. Then was shifted to Langley Field as an instructor of observation in the Field Officers' School.

Since the Fall of 1920 I have been following commercial aeronautics. Went to Mexico in the Summer of 1922 for a big New York contracting concern and made a preliminary survey of the route to be followed by the new national highway running from Mexico City to Acupulco, on the west coast. There were three of us—Hank Tuthill, highway engineer; Charlie Messina, bridge engineer, and yours truly as aeronautical engineer. We sure had some great experiences.

Mexico offers all kinds of chances for commercial aviation, and surveying by means of planes and aerial cameras is the most practical way of getting accurate information in a minimum amount of time. Riding the hurricane deck of a mule across that old Spanish Trail may be all right, but give me the cockpit of a good 'plane any day; it's a —— sight safer and faster.

I've just received my promotion to Lieut.-Colonel, Air Service, Officers Reserve Corps, and assigned to the Three Hundred and Fourth Pursuit Group Headquarters.

Cheerio—Happy Landings to you all. If there is anything I can do to help along let me know.—W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR.

Salem, Ore.

In response to that request of yours for the "low-down" on Ol' Man Wiggins, I will let the curtain slip aside for a space and reveal certain facts. I don't think much would interest the readers of *Adventure;* but for purposes of identification: Born of American parents, the sort labeled "Old American," on Boot Hill, Dodge City, Kansas, about the time the trail herds stopped coming up from Texas. First toy I can remember was my father's revolver, which I soon lost. I've been fooling with firearms ever since, so I guess the inoculation was successful.

Follows a space of years mixed up with schooling, as little as possible, and the rest of the time successfully eluded. Was caught and sentenced to a grocery

counter at an early age, and the sentence is still being served. Have seen a little of what lies between the Missouri River and the "Hiyu Saltchuck" (Pacific Ocean, in Siwash) and experimented with everything in the gun line I could find between those two extremes.

Am somewhat of a crank on the early history of the West—not the sort that is related in the magazines, where the hero lays out a string of dead villains for the heroine's pleasure, but the variety which the old-timers tell about on sunny afternoons, and around the fire in the night, when the wind howls about the firs and the pipes are glowing. And the said old-timers tell some things that the historians don't, or won't, publish, in regard to what actually occurred. For instance, if I have not been lied to frightfully, there were people scalped who *did* live through the experience and recover their health; one of Custer's men got away and kept dark the rest of his life; the most noted gun-fighter of them all shot his men in the back; and Hector MacDonald isn't dead at all. Yes, I have gleaned a lot of interesting things while the old men talk about the fire. Some day perhaps I'll try to tell you the details.

Military record: Well, let's cast a charitable mantle over it. I got in, but not over. But the only point of which I am really proud is that I nearly succeeded in organizing a field meet between the M. P. and the rest of the Thirteenth Division. But General Vanderbilt was not cordial to the idea, so we regretfully passed it up. But, oh, boy, think of what a glorious opportunity went by the board!

At present I am living in the Red Hills, selling eats, writing a bit and thinking of what I will be able to write in a few years more. For there's so much material here in the Pacific Northwest that I can't begin to even visualize it. At present, however, I possess the finest collection of rejection slips that is extant in America, I feel positive.

Personally I am rather heavy; have a game leg and arm; slightly bald; free (being single); white except for a strain of Cherokee blood of which I am very proud; and of voting age. I'd send a photo; but if you published it some one might recognize it, so I'll keep it here.

Ambitions are as follows: To sell a story to *Adventure;* complete my gun collection, and purchase an original painting of Western history by both Remington and Charlie Russell.

All of which fails to point to high intellectual quality, I fear; but at least I never offered a scenario to any motion-picture magnate.—DONEGAN WIGGINS

P. S.—Send some more stationery; a good bunch of second sheets especially.

Slocum, Lone Circumnavigator

IT TOOK him over three years:

Question:—"1. What was the length of the boat Captain Slocum used in his trip around the world? What year did he start, and how long did it take?

2. Did any two men ever row across the Atlantic, from the United States to England? If so what year and how long did it take?"—SEUMAS MCBRIDE, Honolulu, T. H.

Answer, by Mr. Rieseberg:—1. Captain Slocum left for his voyage alone around the world April 24, 1895, and completed same by arriving at New York on June 27, 1898. The vessel used in this famous trip was the *Spray*, 36 feet 9 inches in length, 14 feet 2 inches in breadth, with a gross and net tonnage of 12.71 and 9 respectively.

2. No record is known of any two men ever having crossed the Atlantic from the United States to England by rowing.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Coconut Culture in the Fijis

IT TAKES capital—and time:

Question:—"I should like to ask you a few questions relative to the coconut industry in the South Sea Islands. In hopes of making this easier for you, as I know you must be kept busy answering foolish letters like this, I will put my questions under numbers:

1. Would it be possible to buy or lease a small island large enough for a grove of say one thousand trees? Also price?

2. What is the average number of trees in a fair-paying grove?

3. What price would it be possible to market the coconuts at and the usual price paid for copra, etc?

4. What would it cost to start a grove of coconuts—to plant—and how long would it be before the trees started to bear?

5. As to shipping products. Would I have to deliver them to a port, or would they be called for?

This may be out of your territory, but could you tell me if there are any coconut groves along the coast of Mexico?

If this should be printed in *Adventure* please do not print name."—C. H., Vancouver, B. C.

Answer, by Mr. C. Brown, Jr.:—Everything depends—and coconut culture in the South Sea Islands has many dependents—on what part of the island world you start your plantation. You see, in some groups land laws, prices and conditions differ to a very large extent. Consequently what goes for one group of islands will not do for another.

I take you to be a British subject. Wherefore I am suggesting for your venture—and you will find quite a bit of adventure in it, too—a British crown colony, Fiji. Already Fiji is in a direct line of communication with Canada. Indeed several million dollars of her produce is going there every year.

Now I shall take your questions up in their numerical order.

1. Out in Fiji you should find a small island suitable for the coconut plantation your mind is busily laying out. But this island should support more than a thousand trees—say twenty-five hundred to start with.

You will lease the island for ninety-nine years, this being the closest thing to an outright purchase you can get. The Britishers are endeavoring to protect the land interests of the Fiji Islanders. You

will pay from a sixpence to a pound sterling a year per acre.

2. Twenty-five hundred trees will give you a fair income. Many groves run to five and ten thousand trees, everything depending on the amount of land one has and the number of pounds sterling behind him for the development of such land.

3. Coconut planters reckon that they should receive from $1 to $1.50 net a tree each year after they come into bearing. But this is not always the case. Market conditions have much to do with the profits of copra.

4. You should have at least $4,000 to $5,000 with which to begin the venture. In the first place you will have to have your land cleared of the brush; then, after selecting your nuts and giving them about eighteen months in the nursery, you will have a wait of seven or eight years for their maturity after planting. In the mean time you must live, you know.

5. Everything depends on how your plantation is situated. If you are near the mainland—that is to say, close to Suva, the principal copra-exporting port out that way—your produce will be called for. In most cases, however, each individual planter transports his own produce to his closest market, providing he is satisfied with what that market is paying for copra.

Growing and transporting conditions are similar in the many other groups of my vast territory. In French Oceania land can be bought, leased for long periods of time or rented from month to month. This also holds true for the far-flung Solomons and New Hebrides.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Custer's Last Fight

THE official record of how he was armed and dressed on the day of his death:

Question:—"I would like to make a few inquiries regarding a subject I have been interested in for some time; namely, Custer's Last Fight in 1876.

What make and model of guns did Custer's men carry on their last campaigns? An old soldier with whom I have been in correspondence and who served in the Eighth Cavalry 1870-'75 says that the regiments were armed at that time with .50-caliber Sharps carbines, while the War Department states that it was the Springfield carbine model 1873 .45 cal. Which is correct? And what causes their diffrence in opinion? It would seem that they would both be good authorities on the subject.

Were the men armed with .44-cal. cap-and-ball Colt revolvers?

Could you refer me to any books that would be good authorities on the battle? Some time ago I got on the track of a pamphlet entitled 'Cyclorama of Custer's Last Battle,' put out by the Boston Cyclorama Co. in 1889, but have never been able to locate a copy. This book was supposed to be an authentic account."—WESLEY FITCH, Kinsman, O.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—Volume 4 of Contributions in the State Historical Library says:

"General Custer himself; his brother, Captain Tom Custer; his adjutant, Lieutenant Cook; and his old comrade of the Army of the Potomac, Captain Myles W. Keogh, were all dressed alike, in buckskin coats of Indian-tanned, beaver-trimmed buckskin, with broad-brimmed hats of light color and long riding-boots. General Custer was mounted on his swift and beautiful thoroughbred sorrel horse, Vic, and was armed with a *Remington breech-loading rifle* and two ivory-handled revolvers. The men were armed with the *regulation Springfield breech-loading cavalry carbine, and revolvers.* No sabers or swords were carried by either officers or men."

We are not in a position to give you anything more definite than this. However, we are taking this matter up with the State Historical Society, and if they can not give you anything more, they might refer you to Washington for more explicit information. In this way you might get trace of "Cyclorama of Custer's Last Battle."

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Indians of Canada

DID you know there are over one hundred thousand classed as such? Though of course not all of them are full-blooded:

Question:—"I would like to know the number and present condition of the Iroquois Indians in Canada. I understand that some of the Mohawks are located in your vicinity, and others at St. Regis, Caughnawaga, and on the Grand River near Brantford.

What percentage are of pure blood?

How many were in the World War? Where would I be able to get some publications in their own language?"—NORMAN H. BARKER, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—I can not tell you the number of Iroquois in Canada. All told we have 105, 988 Indians.

The great majority of the Indians of Ontario are Ojibways and are of Algonquin stock. The Oneidas of the Thames, near London; the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, near Deseronto; the Mohawks of the Parry Sound District and the Six Nations of the Brantford Reserve are of Iroquoian stock. Then then there are Iroquois at Caughnawaga, near Montreal; Lake of Two Mountains, Que., and St. Regis opposite Cornwall, Ont.

The percentage of pure-blooded Indians in Canada today—in my humble opinion—is very small, but I have no access to figures. Neither can I tell you how many served in the war, but I will say that the Indians of Canada did their bit and did it well.

The condition of the Indians in Canada can leave little to be desired. They govern themselves under the Indian Department, and they are the least oppressed, the least taxed of any of us. They are rapidly developing in all branches, can take their place successfully against any other race on the land or water or in athletics. Occasionally a band has a lapse, but when the authorities get to the bottom of the trouble they find it the work of some evil-minded, selfish instigator who is trying to enrich himself at their expense.

For books, etc., write Duncan C. Scott, Superintendent, Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, Ont.

Three Counties of Oklahoma

SOMETHING about a little-known part of a great oil-producing State. With asphalt in sight and indications of many minerals, there's no telling but that southeastern Oklahoma is due for a boom in the near future:

Question:—"I have become interested in McCurtain County, Okla., and would like to locate somewhere between Idabel and Hochatown, between Alikchi and Bethel or in Le Flore County in the neighborhood of Folsom, Red Bank or Poteau. Won't you kindly give me any information you can in reference to these counties and these particular places?

Is the land well wooded? Are the lumber-mills situated close by? Could the lumber be disposed of to them at an advantage? What are the agriculture possibilities of these sections? Also what are the mineral possibilities, oil, coal, asphalt, etc?

Are there any Government lands now open in this territory which may be filed on, and what are the requirements?"—H. L. ROBERTSON, Winston-Salem, N. C.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—McCurtain County occupies the extreme southeastern portion of Oklahoma. It is one of the largest counties in the State, having an area of 1,900 sq. mi. The greater part of the county lies in the Ouachita Mountain region. The surface is extremely rough in the northern portion. The resistant sandstones produce ranges of high hills which are known as mountains.

The wide belt along Red River is very nearly level. The drainage is principally into the Little River, which crosses the southern part of the county. All the important tributaries of this stream come from the north. The rainfall is fairly heavy, averaging about 45 inches per year.

Nearly the entire county was originally timbered. A large part of the timber was a fine growth of long-leaf pine. This has been cut over in the greater part of the county, but lumbering is still an important industry.

Only the southern part of the county is important as an agricultural region, the northern part being entirely too rough for successful farming. Even what flat areas there are in the northern portion are not farmed, as most of this section is used for ranging livestock.

Practically speaking, there are no roads in the northern part of the county except mere trails through the wooded ihlls. In the southern part the roads receive more attention and are in better condition. The southern part is more thickly settled. The estimated population is about 25,000.

Pushmataha County lies in the southeastern part of the State and has an area of about 1,430 sq. mi. The general nature of the county is somewhat on the same order as that of McCurtain.

Practically the entire county is timbered except where timber has been cut from small areas for farming. Over most of the county there were originally valuable forests, principally of long-leaf pine. Some of these remain, although much of the better timber has been cut.

Agricultural pursuits are carried on by most of the population, but only a small percentage of the land is tillable. The stream valleys are farmed principally and these in a small way. The valley of the Kiamichi supports much the greater part of the population.

Reports have been made from time to time about the finding of lead, zinc and copper and even of gold and silver in the county, but so far no metals have been found in quantity.

Asphalt has been found n ear Jumbo in the western part of the county and near Tuskahoma in the north-central part of the county. It can not be used for paving, but is utilized in the manufacturing of varnishes, waterpro ofing and other materials.

No oil or gas has been found, although the presence of asphalt led many to prospect for petroleum; but it is highly improbable that any deposits of either substance will be found in the steeply tilted rocks of this region. The county is sparsely settled, there being estimated about 18,000 population.

The northern part of Le Flore County lies in the Arkansas Valley, and the southern part in the Ouachita Mountains. The southern part is rough. Farming in the northern part. Coal is found in the northern part and is mined at several places, including Fanshawe, Howe, Wister, Poteau, Fanama, and Bokoshe. Gas has been produced for some years near Poteau. The population is about 41,000.

For information on lands, write to N. C. MacNab, Indian Land Service Ass'n., 302 Atco Bldg., Tulsa, Okla.

Sealing in Alaskan Waters

TWO kinds of seals; and two kinds of sealing:

Question:—"I would like the following information about Alaska.

What are my chances for going on a seal-hunt?

Where are they most plentiful? How much are the skins worth? What is the shortest and least expensive way of getting there?

I would feel immeasurably indebted to you if you can get me in touch with a reader of *Adventure* somewhere in Alaska who has had experience."—ROBERT LISKER, Shenandoah, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—Getting folks partners is one of the tabooed things in this department. Getting you a correspondent who is an *Adventure* reader is a good deal like that. However, I'd take a chance and give you the name if I knew one who wouldn't mind. I don't.

As to your main inquiry—seal-hunting—there is one fatal defect in your question: You do not say whether you want to chase the festive fur seal or his plebeian congener, the hair seal. The latter you can get in scads if you go about hunting him right, in Bering Sea, and particularly in the Arctic waters of Alaska. Aside from the value of the blubber and meat, which you might trade to the natives, who rarely have gumption enough adequately to supply themselves, there is the value of the skin, which is only a few dollars.

The fur seal, however, like partners in Alaska, is a tabu proposition. Ever hear about pelagic sealing? That means just privateering after them in the waters of Bering Sea, in defiance of the United States law. You're a seal poacher, and are liable to arrest with big penalties.

The Government owns the Seal Islands, which

are the Pribiloffs, St. George and St. Paul, and "lets" the concession to land and knock the poor brutes on the snouts, killing them and taking the pelts. So many of such and such ages, etc., are allowed to be killed each year, and the Government gets its rake-off. So there you are!

Rampart Guns

IT'S interesting to speculate how an ancient firearm, almost certainly of Spanish manufacture, found its way to a town in interior New York:

Question:—"I located a probable rampart gun. Weight about 40 pounds. Length over all 71 inches. Brass shoulder plate, barrel 4 feet 4 inches. Ramrod brass-tipped, stock full length, probably mahogany or rosewood. Brass initial plate, ringed hammer (flint). 'Phony'-looking date—1720.

What gun is it? Did the Sullivan Expedition against the Indians of western New York have any equipment of this description?

Is it rare? I thought not. Owner said it was used in that expedition, but being pressed was apparently without the knowledge."—F. J. PETERSON, Suffern, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Barker:—It is always a pleasure to receive a letter with an adequate description of what the inquirer is asking about, and an additional one when it contains a photograph of the article. Out of so many utterly "impossible" letters—and it might surprize you to learn that a majority of my letters are such—a letter like yours is an oasis in the desert.

The gun is without question a rampart gun. The length and weight alone determine that beyond peradventure. I recently saw a European Migulet-lock wall-piece of 58 inches; caliber, .75. And a European matchlock wall-piece of 69 inches; caliber, .60.

The gun is in all probability of Spanish origin and manufacture. The Migulet lock, with ringed hammer, square frizzen (or battery) and main spring on the outside of the lock, when of European manufacture was almost universally—though not entirely so—of Spanish make.

This gun was probably brought to this country on some ship, having been taken, very possibly by buccaneers, in South American countries. It is the kind of gun that such cities as Panama would have had for wall defense, and might well have been taken by Sir Henry Morgan in the sack of that city. I have one of similar design and the same lock, but with a bag-shaped butt, inlaid with brass lions and the like, and a flaring or blunderbus muzzle. Mine is about 36 inches long and has a saddle hook on the reverse plate.

The Migulet lock—whose peculiarities are the outside main spring and two rear stops protruding through the lock-plate instead of a notched tumbler inside the plate as in the flintlock proper—followed the snaphaunce, and is called by some writers snaphaunce. Although fired by means of a flint, it is not what is properly termed a flintlock, which is a later gun.

I am always suspicious of dates cut on stocks, although they may be genuine. Allowing that the gun reached this country as I have suggested, it is perfectly possible that it could have been carried in Sullivan's Expedition in 1779. The gun is plenty old enough, as it is possible to have been made as early as 1600. Has it no Spanish armorer's marks in gold on barrel or lock-plate? Spanish pieces usually have, instead of a name as in the case of English and French pieces.

Sullivan had 5,000 men on his expedition and carried cannon, so may well have carried wall-pieces, although as a rule they were used in stationary fortifications only. However, at that period they were glad to utilize any firearms they could obtain. Yes, I should call it rare.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Muskies, Trout, Perch

THEIR habits; also, a recipe for frying fresh-water fish:

Question:—"I want to know about the following questions as much as possible without much trouble from you. If you publish this please do not sign my name to it. Here go the questions:

1. How to tell the pools where the maskinonge can be caught.
2. Know ripples where the trout sport.
3. Know where the perch have their haunts.
4. Know how to bake and cook them woodsman's style.
5. And a simple way of tanning hides."— ——, ——, Dothan, Ala.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—Am no authority on maskinonge or tanning hides, but will do the best I can with your letter.

1. I don't believe there is any way of telling "the pools where maskinonge can be caught," judging by my experience with other fishes, unless one is guided by the time of year; that is, you will find the fish lying deeper in the cooler weather, and in the stiller water too.

2. "How to know the ripples where the trout sport?" In the Summer-time you are likely to find them anywhere in shallow water. As the weather grows cooler they are more apt to be found near pools, and in the pools themselves as the year grows still older.

3. Perch are apt to be found in the lee of big stones and around old logs.

4. How to bake and cook fish woodsman style? I don't like any freshwater fish baked, and don't know how to bake them. When in the woods I fry my fish in deep, *red-hot* bacon fat after dipping them in beaten egg—if I have any eggs—and rolling them in cornmeal or cracker-crumbs. Fish are very nice when broiled on the live coals of a burned-down fire; but the wood of the fire should be something like oak, hickory or birch, or there won't be any coals. Another good way to broil fish in the woods is to do it on stones that have been heated in the camp-fire.

5. As for tanning hides, as I said above, I am no authority on this. When I get a hide I want to keep, I nail it, stretched tight, on a board, keep the fat scraped off by means of a dull knife, rub salt into it and let it dry; then I send it to some professional tanner and have it fixed up right.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

A NUMBER of copies of "Old Ninety-seven" have been sent in by readers in response to a request printed in the August 20th issue. As is usual in the case of a song that has been passed on by word of mouth and not in print, no two copies are the same.

I have taken the three best and combined them to make a representative text. The copies from which the following composite version was made were sent in by W. H. Holtsclaw of West Virginia, L. O. Lineberger of North Carolina, and J. F. H., a war veteran now in hospital at Camp Kearny.

Old Ninety-seven

I was standing on a mountain one cold frosty morning,
I was watching the smoke from below;
It was curling from a long straight smoke-stack
'Way down on the Southern Railroad.

It was Old Ninety-seven, the fastest mail-train
The South had ever seen,
And it ran so fast on that fatal Sunday
That the death list numbered thirteen.

It was Old Ninety-seven, the fastest mail-train
Ever run over the Southern Line,
And when she arrived at Monroe, Virginia,
She was forty-seven minutes behind.

Steve Branniel was the engineer,
The fastest on the line;
He ran into Monroe to get his orders,
And he got them on the fly.

They gave him his orders at Monroe, Virginia,
Saying: "Steve, you are 'way behind!
This is not Thirty-eight, but it's Old Ninety-seven;
You must put her in Spencer on time!"

Steve Branniel climbed up into his cabin,
Saying, "Pal, it's do or die!"
He reversed his lever, threw his throttle wide open
Saying, "Watch Old Ninety-seven fly."

Steve Branniel climbed up into his cabin;
At his throttle he made a grab,
And when he pulled over Johnson's Junction
He was leaning 'way out of the cab.

Steve Branniel turned to his brave little fireman
Saying: "Shovel in a little more coal.
There's a three-mile grade round Whitlow Mountain;
You may watch my drivers roll."

Steve Branniel turned to his brave little fireman,
Said, "Jack, throw in more coal,
And put your head out the window, boy,
And watch my drive-wheels roll!"

It's a mighty bad road from Lynchburg to Danville;
It is a three-mile grade.
'Twas on the grade Steve lost control of his air-brakes,
So you see what a jump he made.

He was falling down-grade at ninety miles an hour.
The whistle began to scream.
He was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle
And his body all scarred by steam.

Did he ever pull in? No; he never pulled in,
Though his train was due at ten,
And for hours and hours the switchman lay waiting
For the mail-train that never pulled in.

The news ran over the telegraph wires
And this is what it said—
That the brave engineer that left Monroe this morning
Is lying at North Danville dead.

Come, all you young ladies, and take warning;
Take warning from this time.
Never speak rash words to your sweetheart—
He may go and never return.

It seems pretty clear that the song was composed on an actual event, and that it is the work of a single author, though touched up a bit by other hands. At any rate it shows some of the traits of the folk-song that seem to come from oral transmission. The style, however, is in general that of the broadside rather than that of the folk themselves.

VERY different is the deep-sea chantey which I quote from the same anonymous sailor's note-book in which I found "Roll the Cotton Down" printed in the issue of Nov. 10, 1923. In order to save space I print, in most cases, two different solo lines in each verse, though in my copy each line is repeated.

A Long Time Ago

From Liverpool city to Frisco I went
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
To make a good voyage it was my intent
A long time ago!

I shipped in a ship of the Black Ball Line
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
I shipped in a ship of the Black Ball Line
A long time ago!

Oh, I'll never forget that night off Cape Horn
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
We were going twelve knots with our main skys'l set
A long time ago!

When the man on the lookout reported the land
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
It's then you should hear our bold captain's command
A long time ago!

"Every man to his station! We'll put her about!
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
And we'll point her for Frisco this very night."
A long time ago!

But when I arrived in Frisco town
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
The runners came off from Shanghai Brown
A long time ago!

Oh, I picked up my bag and I went on shore
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
And like all other fools took in whisky galore
A long time ago!

And now I'm shanghaied back to Liverpool town
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
And now I'm shanghaied back to Liverpool town
A long time ago!

Away down South where I was born
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
Amongst the fields of yellow corn
A long time ago!

I courted a girl, her name it was Nell
To my hey—ay—ay—yah!
And when I return we'll both get wed
A long time ago!

Can't some of you tall-water men who have been "round Stiff" pipe up a few more for the rest? I've been working at the chantey for over a year and have more than nine hundred texts in my own collection, but I'm not going to print any of them unless you're interested. And the best way of proving that you are interested is to sit down and send some in. If you do, please send them in just as they are *really* sung; I will do all the editing necessary to make them printable.

THERE are many old songs that make most modern attempts look pretty sick by comparison. I'd be greatly obliged to any of you men or women about the Camp-Fire who would send in a few more of the songs our grandfathers and grandmothers used to sing.

SEND all contributions to the department and all requests for old songs direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif. Do *not* send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FEBRUARY 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE UNDESIRABLE SVENSON — ***Conroy Kroder***
The Hounds of old San Francisco.

THE STORY OF THE FIRST SCRIBE — ***George E. Holt***
The master of the *Djinoon* aids Mohamed Ali.

THE LONG KNIVES **A Five-Part Story** **Conclusion** — ***Hugh Pendexter***
The American Legion of 1793 in action against the Indians.

ONE NIGHT AND THE MORNING **An Off-the-Trail Story*** — ***Aaron Wyn***
A Scandinavian among the Brazilians.

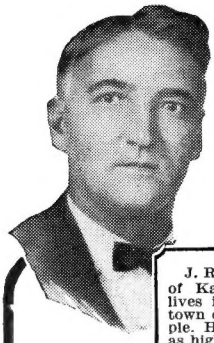
THE EDGED TOOL — ***F. St. Mars***
An American wildcat in English woods.

THE BLUE VAULT — ***Murray Horton Johnson***
The tale of a kite.

**See footnote at bottom of first contents page.*

Still Farther Ahead

IN THE three issues following the next there will be *long stories* by George Brydges Rodney, Barry Scobee, J. D. Newsom, Bill Adams, W. C. Tuttle, Gordon MacCreagh, Leonard H. Nason, J. Allan Dunn, Arthur D. Howden Smith and Wilbur Watkins; and short stories by Gordon Young, Georges Surdez, Royce Brier, John T. Rowland, H. C. Bailey, Frederick Moore, William Byron Mowery, E. S. Pladwell, Michael J. Phillips, F. St. Mars, Sidney Herschel Small, John Eyton and others—stories of the jungle, the West, the Spanish Main, Alaska, medieval France, South America, Labrador, Japan, the sea, the desert, the South Seas and the War, Indians, sailors, soldiers, cowboys, pirates, knights at arms—of adventurers the world around.



J. R. HEAD of Kansas, who lives in a small town of 631 people. He has made as high as $69.50 in one day selling Comer All-Weather Coats.

E. A. SWEET, an electrical engineer, is making from $600 to $1,200 a month and works only about four hours a day.

W. S. COOPER, of Ohio, who finds it easy to earn over $500 a month selling Comer All-Weather Coats.

Will You Give Me a Chance to Pay You $100 a Week?

I want to make an offer whereby you can earn from $100 to $1,000 a month, cash. You can be your own boss. You can work just as many hours a day as you please. You can start when you want to and quit when you want to. You don't need experience and you get your money in cash every day when you earn it.

These Are Facts

Does that sound too good to be true? If it does, then let me tell you what J. R. Head did in a small town in Kansas. Head lives in a town of 631 people. He was sick, broke, out of a job. He accepted my offer. I gave him the same chance I am now offering you. At this new work he has made as high as $69.50 for one day's work. If that isn't enough, then let me tell you about E. A. Sweet of Michigan. He was an electrical engineer and didn't know anything about selling. In his first month's spare time he earned $243. Inside of six months he was making between $600 and $1,200 a month.

W. J. McCrary is another man I want to tell you about. His regular job paid him $2.00 a day, but this wonderful new work has enabled him to make $9,000 a year. Yes, and right this very minute you are being offered the same proposition that has made these men so successful. Do you want it? Do you want to earn $40.00 a day?

Important Notice

The Comer Manufacturing Company is the largest business of its kind in the world. Any man who becomes a representative is assured of fair, square, honest treatment and will have reason to be proud of his connection with the company.

A Clean, High-grade Dignified Business

Have you ever heard of Comer All-Weather Coats? They are advertised in all the leading magazines. Think of a single coat that can be worn all year round. A good-looking, stylish coat that's good for summer or winter—that keeps out wind, rain or snow, a coat that everybody should have, made of fine materials for men, women and children, and sells for less than the price of an ordinary coat.

Now, Comer Coats are not sold in stores. All our orders come through our own representatives. Within the next few months we will pay representatives more than three hundred thousand dollars for sending us orders. And now I am offering you the chance to become our representative in your territory and get your share of that money. All you do is to take orders. We do the rest. We deliver. We collect and you get your money the same day you take the order.

You can see how simple it is. We furnish you with a complete outfit and tell you how to get the business in your territory. We help you to get started. If you only send us three average orders a day, which you can get in an hour or so in the evening, you will make $100 a week.

Maybe You Are Worth $1,000 a Month

Well, here is your chance to find out, for this is the same proposition that enabled George Garon to make a clear profit of $40.00 in his first day's work—the same proposition that gave R. W. Krieger $20.00 net profit in a half hour. It is the same opportunity that gave A. B. Spencer $625 cash for one month's spare time.

I need 500 men and women, and I need them right away. If you mail the coupon at the bottom of this ad I will show you the easiest, quickest, simplest plan for making money that you ever heard of. I will send you a complete outfit. I will send you a beautiful style book and samples of cloth. I will tell you where to go, what to say, and how to succeed. Inside of thirty days you can have hundreds of dollars in cash. All you need do today is write your name down below, cut out the coupon and mail it to me at once. You take no risk, you invest no money, and this may be the one outstanding opportunity of your life to earn more money than you ever thought possible.

Find Out NOW

Remember, it doesn't cost you a penny. You don't agree to anything, and you will have a chance without waiting—without delay and without investment—to go right out and make big money. Do it. Don't wait. Mail the coupon now.

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BUICK Touring Car Free to You

In addition to your big earnings we offer you a Buick Touring Car without a cent of cost, that you can use to help you in developing this great business. Mail the coupon.

NOW

Mail This Special Coupon Now

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Dept. BSC-66, Dayton, Ohio.
Please send me, without expense or obligation, your special proposition, together with complete outfit and instructions, so I can begin at once to earn money, and get a Buick Touring Car Free.

Name.....

Address.....

(Print or write plainly)

His Peculiar Power Over the Animals of the Jungle

won *Gato* the fearsome name "The Jungle Thing." No tobobas —the deadliest of serpents—would harm him; ferocious wildcats would fawn on him. Whence came this strange supernatural power? Has *Gato* the right to marry the girl who both loves and fears him—*Gato,* in whose eyes the image of an angry wildcat is plainly visible! Read this amazing story, "The Jungle Thing," by Eugene Cunningham—one of the many fascinating tales in

1st in fiction

Everybody's Magazine

January

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